Stourbridge
CHRONICLE
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CONCERN OVER TRAVELLERS' SITE

Report by Jamie Brassington

A SHORTLIST of locations for a travellers' holding camp in Dudley has been revealed with four of the ten potential sites being in Lye.

Councillors and a former councillor warn it could spark a backlash from worried residents.

The next area of the borough with most potential sites is Coseley with three, including the most likely.

The shortlist, ranked in order of the most likely sites to be used, are: Budden Road, Coseley; Bott Lane, Lye; the former Helix Factory, Bott Lane, Lye; Webb Street, Coseley; Blowers Green Road, Dudley; Thorns Road, Lye; Fountain Lane/Budden Road, Coseley; Clinic Drive in Lye; Delph Lane, Withymoor; and The Straits, Gornal.

Former Lye councillor Abdul Quadas said: "People in Lye won't be happy with a transit camp.

"There will be more crime. We haven't got the police because of the cuts. Where will the law enforcement come from?

"I'm very much against this. I will take it up. The community will be very unhappy about this."

Opposing

Coseley East ward councillor Melvyn Mottram said: "A transit site in Coseley will cause a backlash and anger from residents and quite rightly too.

"I know we need one in the borough but myself and fellow ward councillor Susan Ridney will be opposing this strongly."

Council leader Councillor Patrick Harley, said: "I understand the identification of a proposed site may cause concern among residents, so we will be holding events in the community to explain why the site is required.

"But I do feel that due to the increasing number of incursions over recent years, we really do need to do something now to stop so many of our parks and open spaces being targeted by travellers."

Figures show 56 traveller incursions in the past three years costing £450,000 in clean-up and eviction costs.

Councillor Harley added: "Last year I made a firm commitment we would set up a transit site to help clamp down on the number of unauthorised camps set up across the borough.

"Once we have a site in the borough, rather than go through a legal process which can take days, the police can use further powers to direct an unauthorised encampment to move to the transit site without delay."

SAM MIGHT SAY NOEL'S HIS NO1 ROCK 'N' ROLL STAR

Budding rock 'n' roller Sam Fisher impressed Noel Gallagher (inset), formerly of Oasis, with his cheeky request to join him on stage

SCHOOLBOY Sam Fisher got more than he could have dreamed off when he wrote to his hero Noel Gallagher.

Not only did the Kinver High School pupil get a reply from the former Oasis star but he has also been invited to meet Noel backstage when he plays at Arena Birmingham in May.

Thirteen-year-old Sam wrote to Noel asking if he would come and speak at his school. Within 24 hours of posting his letter it had been shared on Instagram by the rocker and liked by tens of thousands of fans around the world. Although Sam's invitation was declined, a further letter prompted an offer of backstage passes for the Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds gig.

Sam, from Caunsall, said: "Our teacher said write to anyone you want to about coming in to do a talk about whatever you want." Sam's handwritten letter said: "I am a big fan of yours. My class have been searching the topic of drugs in PSHE and (I know you are now clean) would like to hear about how you turned it around."

Noel shared it on Instagram saying: "Thanks for the offer Sam but as much as I'd love to come and regale your PSHE class with war stories from the 90s I'm gonna have to pass as I'm currently in re-hab . . . I mean the studio!!!" In a second letter Sam said it was his dream to play with Noel. Noel replied: "Blimey, you don't want much do you, eh?" Sam has been contacted about VIP tickets.

HONOURS

Roy and RAF get freedom of borough

THE RAF and a distinguished Black Country businessman are the latest names in line for the prestigious freedom of Dudley borough.

Dudley Council is set to bestow the honours on RAF Cosford and Roy Richardson. The move was approved by councillors at a meeting of the full council on Monday.

RAF Cosford opened in 1938 and next year marks the 80th year of the air force station. It has a long association with the borough recruiting staff locally as well as supporting events such as Armed Forces Day.

Roy Richardson is most famous for developing the Merry Hill shopping centre with his late brother Don.

RACE

Marathon is axed as entries dwindle

THE Wolverhampton Marathon has been axed after a fall in entrants.

Fewer than 200 signed up for this year's 26.2 mile Carver Wolverhampton City Marathon. Organisers will instead boost places by an extra 1,000 for the half-marathon, cycling race and the 10k.

Henry Carver, managing director of main sponsor Carvers Building Supplies, said: "It was a difficult decision."

PLANNING

Children's home plan withdrawn

AN application for a house to be turned into a children's care home in Dudley has been withdrawn.

Dozens of objections were received from properties in Wistmans Close at Milking Bank citing concerns over parking and noise. The home would have accommodated up to four children under the age of 18, who need 'care and guidance'.

INSIDE

IT'S A CRUELLA WINTER AT REP

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Vandalism is a drain on theatre funds

VANDALS have attacked the former Dudley Hippodrome building forcing campaigners to hire security guards to patrol the Castle Hill landmark.

The vandalism has come as a major blow to campaigners who are currently raising money to restore the site to its former glory, under the new name Black Country Hippodrome.

They warn that the vandals could put the project behind schedule because resources and money is being spent on tackling the problem.

Paul Collins, chairman of Black Country Hippodrome Limited, which took on a five-year lease of the building a year ago, said: "We are working to bring this theatre back for the whole community."

But the group revealed they had been working to tackle bouts of vandalism since they took on the lease from Dudley Council and have decided to take on security guards to patrol the empty building.

Mr Collins explained: "It appeared to be a regular thing. It seemed that they had broken in through the fire escapes with golf clubs and smashed the suspended ceilings."

As well as damage, graffiti had been left at the site. Among the messages left included 'RIP Laurel and Hardy' – a reference to the comic duo who performed at the theatre in its heyday.

The company was given a lease of the site, which the previous council administration was considering bulldozing, last December with the aims of having the Hippodrome restored and back open by 2021.

The Hippodrome was built in 1938 and continued as theatre until 1964, then operated as a cinema and finally as a bingo hall before closing in 2009. Alongside providing security, the company has purchased insurance for the building. No one without the correct protective clothing is supposed to enter due to concern about possible asbestos.

Campaigners are hoping to extend the lease but hopes recently took a blow when it was revealed that Dudley College may be interested in the site for a new-build project if the theatre venture fails.

ISIS quip nearly costs manager her college job

A SENIOR member of staff at Dudle College has narrowly avoided losing her job after she wrote a tongue-in-cheek Facebook post about joining terrorist group ISIS.

Claire Millard, curriculum manager for adult skills at the college, posted a picture of herself in traditional head wear during a work visit to Jaipur in India on her personal account. When asked by someone on the social media site if she had joined ISIS, she responded 'yep. Allah Akhbar' alongside a laughing emoji.

The comment landed Ms Millard in hot water with college bosses, who launched disciplinary proceedings. She was suspended from her role last week after the post from the October trip came to light.

Following a hearing on Friday she received a 'serious sanction'.

Principal Lowell Williams said Ms Millard's actions were 'poorly judged'. Several senior members of staff took part in the visit to India as part of Dudley College Worldwide, a development programme.

Hasty

Mr Williams said: "Claire Millard is an exemplary member of staff, who has worked for Dudley College for 12 years. Yet three ill-advised words, typed hastily in response to a post on her personal Facebook page have very nearly cost Claire her job and ended her productive career.

"Unfortunately Claire's response was hasty and poorly judged. It is clear that this comment, particularly if taken out of context, has the potential to offend. At best it is culturally and politically insensitive.

"Claire had no need to post this image on her personal Facebook page and should not have done so. We have delivered many training sessions to staff on the appropriate use of social media and, of course, have a written policy – but it is clear to me that we need to do more."

Ms Millard did not respond to a request for comment.

Festive Alison lights up market

TV and radio presenter Alison Hammond performs the official switch-on of Dudley town centre's Christmas lights

CHRISTMAS officially arrived in Dudley as television personality Alison Hammond brought festive cheer with the annual lights switch-on in Market Place.

Gearing up the crowd with a festive singsong – and a Mexican wave – the This Morning presenter and former Big Brother contestant couldn't wait to cause a stir.

"It's great to be here and you all look so lovely," she beamed as she appeared on the stage. Alison encouraged the crowds to cheer louder than the Brummies. The 42-year-old, herself from Birmingham, spoke of her visit to Nottingham on Friday to catch a glimpse of the newly-engaged royal couple Prince Harry and Meghan Markle and also about her time on Strictly Come Dancing in 2014.

A false start to the switch on led Mayor Dave Tyler to joke that maybe they 'hadn't paid the bills' this year but then, after a little behind-the-scenes magic, the town centre was lit up to the sound of Mariah Carey's All I Want For Christmas. Hundreds of revellers turned out for the festive event on Saturday, organised by Tudor Markets and Black Country Radio.

First to entertain the crowds was the Black Country's Gentlemen Songsters Male Voice Choir, who got everyone singing carols. Shoppers could buy gifts. Lee Smith, from Stourbridge, who attended with partner Jo and their seven-year-old daughter Ella, said: "It's a great atmosphere."

Christmas tree festival is to be opened at church by MP

BRIERLEY Hill's Parish Church of St Michael's will be opening its annual Christmas Tree Festival at on Saturday.

Dudley South MP Mike Wood will perform the opening ceremony at 11am.

The old church, which was consecrated in 1765, will for have a large numbers of decorated trees to view, free of charge, from 11am until 1pm on the Saturday and then every Thursday until Christmas between 10am and 12.30pm.

The festival was the brainchild of the Rev Beryl Pritchett and has now been a popular event in Brierley Hill for several years.

First-time visitors to the church to look at the trees,can also take the opportunity of viewing the three magnificent stained glass windows presented to the church by John Corbett, the 'Stourbridge Salt King'. He gave them as a gift in memory of his parents Joseph and Hannah Corbett, who are both interred in the churchyard. Two recently rediscovered First World War hand-written scrolls which will be on display.

Meanwhile, a Christmas charity event – including a free Santa's grotto – is to take place in aid of Leslie's Care Packages, which helps the homeless, at St Thomas' Church Hall, Market Street, Stourbridge, from 11am to 3pm on December 16.

Toys R Us are to shut 26 stores

TOYS R Us has confirmed it has drawn up plans to close at least 26 UK stores, putting up to 800 jobs at risk.

The move will not affect Christmas trading and the closures will not take place until spring.

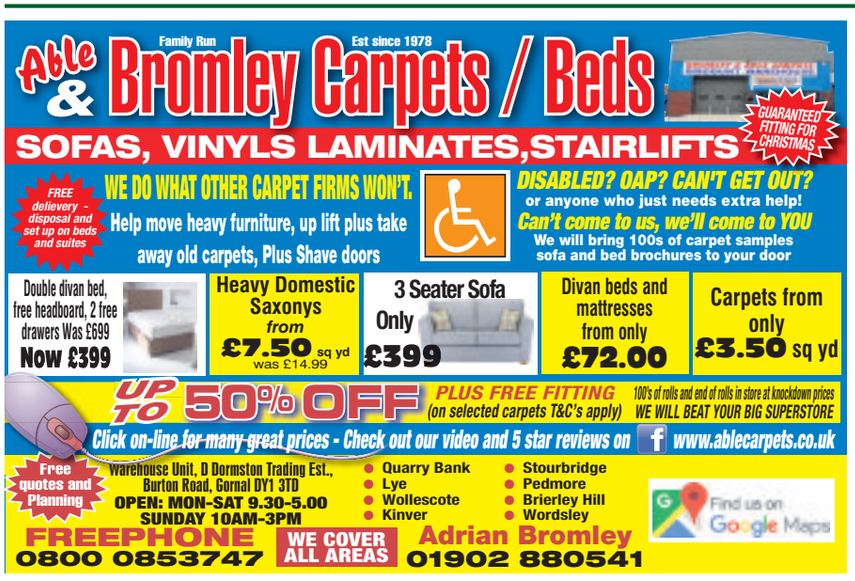
The company employs around 3,350 people with 100 stores across the UK, including branches at Birchley Island in Oldbury and at Merry Hill shopping centre. These are to stay open by the Merry Hill store may be 'downsized'. The store at St Andrews Retail Park in Birmingham is due to close.

The company, which has made losses in the UK for seven of the last eight years, says it needs to transform the business. It comes as the toys and games chain is under growing pressure as millions of parents buy online.

Merry Hill shops were evacuated

PARTS of Merry Hill shopping centre were evacuated on Saturday due to a false alarm.

Shoppers were asked to leave parts of the centre in Brierley Hill. The centre's Twitter account said: "This was a false alarm, no need for concern."



Parts of the Himley Hall estate could be sold off

PARTS of the historic Himley Hall estate could be sold off by cash-strapped Dudley Council.

The 180-acre estate – once home to the Earls of Dudley – is on a list of buildings and land Dudley Council is looking at off-loading as it bids to save £5.6 million over the next three years.

The 18th-century Grade II Listed Himley House is not in danger of being sold as it is a protected heritage asset and raises funds for the council from weddings and conferences. But 'various parts' of the estate – which attracts more than 200,000 visitors a year – could be sold.

The sprawling estate includes the Great Pool, a nine-hole golf course, cafe and car park, set in 180 acres of 'Capability' Brown landscape and woodland. There are also various outbuildings.

Pressure

Local authority bosses are under pressure to balance the books over the next few years and need to save £5.6 million by 2020.

They will aim to bring money into the coffers by selling off buildings and land.

The council said it was possible 'nothing could happen' with the site but all options remain on the table. Its inclusion on a disposal list, described as 'assets deemed surplus', suggests chiefs would be open to offers.

Street food gets a festive twist

A WINTER 'Street Food Affair' and twilight market is taking place on Saturday at the Bonded Warehouse in Stourbridge.

The event at the Canal Street venue from 3 to 9pm is described as a festive celebration with fantastic food, buskers and winter warmers including hot chocolate, mulled wine, warm sloe gin and rum.

It's an opportunity to buy gifts from talented local artists and crafters, including vintage stalls and festive wreaths.

The range of street food on offer will include the best of British alongside Indian, Caribbean, Italian, American, Brasilian, Japanese and vegan dishes, plus a range of real ales, ciders and local wine.

Santa's on his way

HILLCREST School and Community College in Netherton holds a Christmas fair tomorrow afternoon (Friday), from 3.30 to 5.30. There will be a special appearance by Santa and his Elves. Hot turkey cobs available.

Tributes are paid to former mayor

Mrs Pat Martin – former mayor

TRIBUTES have been paid to a former Mayor of Dudley. Patricia Martin, known as Pat, was a former councillor for Amblecote and also an honorary alderman.

Mrs Martin was rare in that she had also served as mayor in a different part of the country. She served on North Bedfordshire Borough Council from 1974 to 1983, and was Mayor of Kempson in Bedfordshire for two consecutive years.

A teacher, she had gone on to work as deputy headmistress at an English speaking school on Spain's Atlantic island of Gran Canaria until her retirement and move to Stourbridge. In 2000 she was elected to Dudley Council where she served representing Amblecote until she stepped down in 2015. Colleagues described her as enthusiastic, compassionate and someone who worked tirelessly for her constituents.

Mrs Martin was elected Mayor of Dudley for 2009/10, having been deputy previously. Her late husband Bill, for whom Pat cared later in life, enjoyed his role as Mayor's consort and the two were devoted to one another.

Pat also served on the council cabinet as lead member for personnel, legal and property as well as holding numerous key committee memberships during her period of local government service. She was made an Honorary Alderman of Dudley in 2015.

Councillor Patrick Harley, leader of Dudley Council said: "Pat was well liked and well-respected across the whole of the council chamber. She was intelligent, vocal and had a great sense of humour. She'd fight for what she believed in and you knew she was doing it with honesty, integrity and spirit."

She is survived by two children from her first marriage, Simon and Lyndsey.

Dog fouling fines could double across borough

DOG owners who fail to clean up after their pets in Dudley borough could be fined up to £100, which is double the current maximum financial penalty.

Council bosses hope tougher penalties in a proposed Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) will act as a 'deterrent'.

The new order would also stop dogs being allowed in children's play areas, with similar punishment for owners caught flouting the regulations.

The maximum fine is currently £50.

Councillor Karen Shakespeare, cabinet member for environmental services, said: "We know from the amount of complaints we get that dog fouling remains an emotive issue for a lot of residents in the borough, many of them dog owners themselves.

"In the past three years, from April 2014 to April this year, Dudley Council received nearly 1,500 complaints about dog fouling.

"The local authority has a duty to ensure that our public spaces are cleaner, greener and safe for all to enjoy. We hope that introducing tougher penalties for irresponsible dog owners caught not cleaning up after their pets will act as a deterrent."

Survey

An online survey has already launched with residents given the chance to have their say.

The consultation will ask four questions. These include – whether residents support officers insisting that dog owners pick up after their animals on open land with public access, and whether they support fixed penalty notices of up to £100. It also asks people if they are in favour of insisting dogs are kept out of children's play areas, and whether they support penalties of up to £100 for owners who fail to remove dogs from a play area when asked.

The PSPO, if introduced, would replace all existing dog control legislation in the borough. It lasts for a maximum period of three years, after which it can be renewed. A breach of a PSPO is an offence punishable by fixed penalty notice or prosecution in magistrates' court.

Building for better sports at school

Pupils with (left) Stephanie Parkes, sales manager at CALA Homes, and head teacher Vanessa Payne

HAGLEY Primary School have been awarded £,1000 funding towards redevelopment of its hard court sports facilities, thanks to a donation from local house builder CALA Homes.

The upmarket developer, whose Wychbury Fields development is located on Kidderminster Road, has made the donation as part its new community bursary scheme. The money is being used to create an all-weather flood-lit pitch for football, tennis, netball and basketball, as well as being used by the local community.

The CALA Community Bursary was launched in April and invited local charities, organisations and groups to apply for help funding projects which make a vital difference in their communities.

Mark Wright, Managing Director CALA Homes (Midlands), said: "We are thoroughly committed to supporting the communities in which we build and are delighted to provide Hagley Primary School with the funding needed to complete this worthwhile project."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Santas on the run for hospice

MORE than 700 Santas will take over a Stourbridge park this Sunday to for a fun run raising money for the Mary Stevens Hospice. The Santa Jog is an annual event which sees supporters run 5k around Mary Stevens Park, in aid of the Hagley Road charity.

Last year a record number took part in the event with more than 600 Santas. More than 700 people have registered for the 2017 run, including a family fun day.

Meanwhile, last weekend around 150 participants took part in a Santa Dash around Wolverhampton's West Park in aid of the Sedgley-based Beacon Centre for the Blind.

MP opens a new post office branch

STOURBRIDGE MP Margot James has cut the ribbon at the opening of a post office in Quarry Bank High Street, some ten years after the previous branch closed.

The Conservative MP, who is also Small Business Minister, opened the new Quarry Bank Post Office at Premier Stores, in High Street, last week.

Postmaster Naranjan Kaur, who has run the store since 2004, said: "Customers are really pleased to have a Post Office on their doorstep, making life easier, especially as the branch is open seven days a week."

Enjoy cake with mayor in parlour

PEOPLE can enjoy a slice of cake while raising money for the Mayor's charities at a charity coffee morning tomorrow (Friday).

The event, held in the Mayor's Parlour at Dudley Council House, sees the sale of cakes and the raffling of donated items to raise money for the Mayor's charities. Mayor, Councillor Dave Tyler and his wife, Barbara will be hosting the event, 10am to 1pm.

A two-year calendar designed by students at Dudley College will also be on sale for £10, featuring photographs and paintings of the borough.

DYnamic double for a Christmas concert

THE DYnamics Rock and Pop Choir is performing a festive concert in Dudley Town Hall tomorrow night (Friday).

The Dudley-based choir will be joined by The Tipton Treblemakers for the DYnamic Christmas concert at 7pm.

Tickets are £6 with proceeds going to Birmingham Children's Hospital and Prostate Cancer UK. Contact via Facebook or email info@dynamicsrockandpop.co.uk

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COUNTY NEWS

Sales in vinyl countdown rise

VINYL record sales at HMV shops, including those in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Brierley Hill, are on track to top 1.5 million this year. With Ed Sheeran's Divide topping the year's vinyl sales chart, it is a level of sales not achieved since the late 1980s.

Sales are strong across all genres including new releases and back catalogue tiles, with the Gallagher brothers fighting it out in the HMV best seller list. Liam Gallagher's As You Were is currently second and Noel Gallagher's Who Built The Moon? third. HMV is on track to hold one third of the entire UK vinyl market by Christmas.

Good causes get Slade star boost

EX-SLADE musician Jim Lea's recent event at the Robin 2 in Bilston raised £6,300 for charity. Cash from the 68-year-old's An Audience With Jim Lea on November 5 will go to Cancer Research UK and Dementia UK.

The afternoon included the showing of a film of his first solo gig at the venue back in 2002 called For One Night Only and a question and answer session. Due to illness – he has been battling prostate cancer – Jim was unable to perform musically.

His John Birch bass was available to view in Woody's Bar and for a cash donation of £5 fans were able to hold the guitar and have photos taken with it.

Jazzed up views on show in city

MORE than 50 photographs taken as part of a popular jazz festival will be on view for thousands of commuters at Birmingham New Street station.

The exhibition of photography which was run as part of this year's Birmingham, Solihull and Sandwell Jazz Festival will be on display at the station during December and January. The internationally renowned jazz festival returned for its 33rd year in July and featured 225 performances at 100 venues.

Boss of M6 Toll has left after two years

THE boss of Midland Expressway, which runs the 27-mile M6 Toll motorway, has left the company.

Andy Pearson took over as chief executive in the summer of 2015, replacing Tom Fanning who had led Midland Expressway for more than 14 years. Mr Pearson's departure comes six months after the UK's only pay-as-you-go motorway was bought by Australian investment group IFM.

1. Tink often stops to say hello to Bob the goldfish

2. Teddy's confused between a dovecote and a dove cat

3. African pygmy hedgehog Flossy in her woolly nest

4. Bear loves to bite toes and chase around the garden

5. Tortoise Fred lives in the garden and just loves eating buttercups on the lawn

6. Bags of room in here – Benji finds this is a comfortable place to bed down

7. Together – four-year-old guinea pigs Billy and Tom share a very special bond

8. Reeves and Mortimer who were always up to mischief when they were kittens

9. Olaf the rabbit was found in a carrier bag in a tree. Here he is with best friend Anya

10. Milo, a Staffie cross, came from the Dogs Trust and loves doing agility tricks

LAST CHANCE TO VOTE

READERS just have a few more days to pick their favourite in our pets photo competition.

After weeks of being inundated with your treasured pictures of your beloved pets we ran the final shortlist for the first time last week, complete with a voting form for you to have your say on which one you think should win.

Creatures as diverse as cats, dogs, guinea pigs, rabbits, hedgehogs and tortoises have all featured in the popular competition, which has brought home just how much love owners have for their prized pets – with nearly 500 pictures emailed in.

Proud

We are repeating the voting form again this week. But it is the last chance for readers to make their choice as all entries need to be in by Tuesday (December 12).

There was so much choice from the entries submitted – and we appreciate the time taken by proud owners to take the snapshots of their pets – it was difficult for us to pick out the final 10 for the shortlist.

But now the time has come to make a decision.

ANIMAL CRACKERS

To vote for your favourite photograph either email the picture number to sue.attwater@expressandstar.co.uk or tick one box on this form and send it to Sue Attwater, The Chronicle, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

PICTURE 1 ☐	PICTURE 6 ☐
PICTURE 2 ☐	PICTURE 7 ☐
PICTURE 3 ☐	PICTURE 8 ☐
PICTURE 4 ☐	PICTURE 9 ☐
PICTURE 5 ☐	PICTURE 10 ☐

We are not just looking for the cutest pet – though they do all fit that description – but the best picture itself, one that you would pick out if you saw it in the paper.

The winner will be announced later this month with the best-loved picture being carried on the front of our Christmas editions. There is also a £100 cash prize up for grabs.

So please look closely at the 10 shortlisted pictures and choose the one you think deserves the prize and we will be counting up the votes next week.

Volunteers taking over libraries as use declines

FEWER than one in five people are using libraries across Dudley.

Libraries in the borough are used by just 18 per cent of people and the decline in usage of libraries has caused concern among council bosses.

The day-to-day management of the borough's 13 libraries, as well as Dudley's archives centre, has been transferred from the council to volunteers.

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), a charitable social enterprise, has now taken over the running of Dudley borough's libraries.

The council said GLL would be tasked with 'introducing innovative ways of working to generate income to reinvest into the service, update facilities and expand the range of services on offer' at a time when the number of people using libraries continues to fall. It will also be 'expected to make financial savings for the council without impacting on day-to-day service'.

Transferred

All library staff will be transferred to the organisation.

A report revealed the council was considering creating 'community access points', possibly in shops or churches, due in part to the fall in usage of libraries.

Labour's Councillor Ken Finch is concerned. He said: "This is what happened with community centres. They withdrew professional support and unfortunately the volunteers haven't got the expertise to run finance and things like that. Libraries are very important to people who use them."

Councillor Peter Miller, cabinet member responsible for libraries, said: "Libraries and archives are a fantastic community resource and our new partnership with GLL is about making sure they stay that way."

Chris Symons, Director of Development at GLL, said: "We are looking forward to bringing our wealth of experience in libraries management to Dudley to improve the service for local residents and increase footfall."

Park runners are helping charities

ORGANISERS at Dudley Parkrun have made donations to Mary Stevens Hospice and Russells Hall Hospital Georgina Unit after setting up a charity coffee shop. The volunteers running the free weekly run have been setting up a pop-up coffee shop every Saturday in recent months, which has raised hundreds of pounds for local causes. To find out more, visit www.parkrun.org.uk/dudley website.

THE ROYAL NAVAL ASSOCIATION STOURBRIDGE

We wish the people of Stourbridge a MERRY CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR.

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Millions are raked in by charging for parking

ALMOST £5 million in profit was raked in from parking charges during 2016-17 across the Black Country and Staffordshire, marking an increase of almost five per cent on the previous year.

The figures, which were compiled by the RAC, represent income from parking charges and penalty notices with running costs deducted. They showed the four Black Country authorities and four Staffordshire councils brought in £4.99m over the last year, up from £4.75m the year before.

Wolverhampton had the highest total in the region, £1.4 million in 2016-17, although that amount was £474,000 down on last year.

Lichfield recorded a surplus of £1.18m, a slight increase on the previous year, while Walsall Council profited to the tune of £492,000 – an increase of 192 per cent on 2015-16. In Dudley, the local authority made £435,000 profit, up 14.8 per cent, and Sandwell Council brought in £430,000, a rise of 35 per cent. South Staffordshire District Council saw a £75,000 drop in parking charges over the last year.

Across England, councils generated £819m from parking fees and fines in 2016-17, an increase of 10 per cent on the previous year. The Local Government Association said parking charge surpluses were spent on 'essential transport projects'.

Funding boost for emergency centre

HOSPITAL chiefs in Dudley have welcomed an announcement they will be awarded funding for a new emergency treatment centre.

It was revealed in the Budget that Russells Hall Hospital would get a portion of a £2.6 billion pot for healthcare. The cash will be spent on the centre which is currently being built next to the accident and emergency department

Bosses hope it will help to ease the pressure on A&E, which has struggled to meet waiting times..

Diane Wake, chief executive at the Dudley Group NHS Trust, said: "We are delighted by the news that we are to receive funding for our new £2.7 million emergency treatment centre at Russells Hall Hospital."

Charity market

A PUB is hosting a Christmas market to raise money for the Make a Wish Foundation for ill children. There will be more than 20 stalls at the Bramford Arms, Park Road, Woodsetton, on Saturday from 2pm.

Violent thief was caught in Stourbridge

Kenny Field – jailed

A VIOLENT robber who knocked a pensioner unconscious has been jailed for more than five years after being tracked down to Stourbridge

Kenny Field, of Crambourne Close, Rubery, punched the 72-year-old man in the head more than 20 times in an unprovoked 6am attack on Redhill Road, West Heath, Birmingham. The pensioner was left with a fractured eye socket.

It came after Field had already smashed another resident's window in nearby Forrell Grove, West Heath, the same morning.

The 31-year-old thug fled with only a torch following the robbery on January 19 and was identified as the prime suspect following a trawl of CCTV coverage in the area.

He moved out of Birmingham to try to avoid being caught but officers tracked him down to an address in Hob Green Road, Stourbridge, where he was arrested.

Field was convicted of robbery and criminal damage at Birmingham Crown Court. He was also found to be in breach of a restraining order and sentenced to a total of five-and-a-half years imprisonment.

Detective Constable Paul Jauncey, from Force CID, said: "This was a needlessly violent attack which left the victim with sickening head injuries. It was a relentless and cowardly assault by Field who tried to avoid justice by fleeing the area.

"However, through diligent detective work we were able to track him down."

DC Jauncey added: "Field refused to give a reason for the attack and only responded with 'no comment' answers during his police interview.

"It is not just the physical but psychological damage such an assault can cause and Field will now have plenty of time to reflect on his cowardly actions now his freedom has been removed."

Gang of raiders jailed after robbery at shop

MEMBERS of a gang responsible for a terrifying shop raid in Dudley have been locked up.

The four thugs burst into the Super Stop shop in Priory Road, Dudley, armed with an axe, a metal spirit level and a wooden stave on May 12, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard.

The spirit level was slammed down with such force by one of the masked raiders that it carved a three inch groove in the counter, revealed Mr Jonathan Barker, prosecuting. Two other gang members started loading a holdall with cigarettes, cash and alcohol.

The thieves snatched a handbag belonging to the owner's niece, who was about to go on holiday. It was thrown to Aiden Jenkins, the only robber not masked, who was acting as look-out. He removed her £1,000 holiday money and the key fob for her car.

The gang escaped in a Citroen Picasso without number plates that was found dumped in a car park close to Wellington Road, where some had changed their clothes.

They got into a taxi but had been spotted by witnesses and the cab was surrounded by police cars, explained Mr Barker.

Brad Arnold dropped the stolen car key fob as Lee Pritchard tried to hide the cash.

Justice

An ice axe, face coverings and gloves were found in a ruck sack. Stolen alcohol and cigarettes were also recovered.

Judge Simon Ward told the defendants: "You had a range of weapons and a planned exit. It almost worked but, luckily for justice, it did not."

Father-of-one Arnold, aged 20, from Beechwood Road, Kates Hill, and Kyle Dingley, 19, of Victoria Road, Cradley Heath, both admitted robbery and possession of a bladed article. Both were jailed for six years and nine months.

Jenkins, 20, from Hilary Drive, Warstones, and Lee Pritchard, 24, of Gloucester Road, Netherton, were both convicted of the two offences after trial. They were sentenced to seven years detention and ten years jail respectively.

Dinosaur safari project at caverns

The dinosaurs will be like those that were included at the Jurassic Kingdom, which visited Birmingham

MOVING life-sized dinosaurs are set to be introduced to caves under Dudley as a new attraction.

The dinosaur safari is proposed by Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust in a £150,000 project unveiled this week.

It would feature 20 robot dinosaurs which would be viewed by visitors on-board canal boats as part of a tour lasting up to an hour. It would be the first underground dinosaur exhibition in the country. The trust has launched a public fundraising to help support the project.

The dinosaurs would be shipped from China and would be similar to those which featured at Jurassic Kingdom, which visited Birmingham Botanical Gardens in the summer.

Sarah Fellows, heritage activities officer, said: "We came up with the idea of a dinosaur exhibition as it links in with the heritage of the limestone caves."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Road closure for water scheme

A ROAD was be closed this week in Dudley as part of a £6.3 million water scheme.

Corbyns Hall Road in Pensnett was due to be shut from Monday until it was scheduled to be re-opened tomorrow (Friday) as teams from South Staffs Water were connecting supplies as part of a wider project on High Street and Pensnett Road.

Two new sets of traffic lights were put up on High Street, at the junctions with High Oak and Tansey Green Road, to ease congestion this week and make it safer for turning traffic. High Street was being widened to two lanes.

Tributes after tragic discovery

TRIBUTES have poured in for Stourbridge's Matthew Gill on an online page set up in his memory.

Dozens of people have left messages of support on the Facebook page which was originally set up to try and find the 43-year-old who worked in Kidderminster.

His family revealed he had been found dead in woodland off the A449 near to Stourton on November 26, near where his car had been found.

Mr Gill, who was known as Liggy, vanished on October 6, sparking a nationwide campaign to find him.

Club kicks-off annual toy appeal

DUDLEY Town FC has launched its Christmas Toy Appeal in aid of the children's ward at Russells Hall Hospital. It will be the 14th year the club has brought festive cheer to children spending Christmas in the hospital.

The club is appealing for new toys and games, from babies to teenagers, or donations on its Just Giving page. New toys can be dropped off at Cushillo Personnel's offices in Lower High Street, Stourbridge, The Black Country Hub store at Merry Hill or the Black Country T-Shirt shop in Castle Street, Dudley, until December 17.

Tree festival and carol service held at church

SCHOOLS and groups have been invited to decorate Christmas tree for a festival taking place in a Stourbridge church.

Trees will be on display at St Thomas's Church, Market Street, throughout December. On Saturday the building will be open to view the display from 9.30am until 2pm then from 3 to 5pm with a carol service in between. Programme at church door for 50p, to include tea and mince pies.

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IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

Fairytale complaint just load of nonsense

SARAH Hall has asked for the fairytale Sleeping Beauty to be banned from her son's school, in case it corrupts the six-year-old's mind. She is particularly unhappy that the handsome prince kisses the heroine while she is asleep.

"It's a specific issue about sexual behaviour and consent," she says.

Perhaps it's me, but don't these people have dirty minds? The story has been read to children for the past 700 years, yet no-one else has seen it as being about sexual behaviour and consent.

It does make one think about how many classic fairytales are acceptable in today's puritanical, politically-correct society.

Hansel and Gretel is obviously out. For a start they live in a house made of marzipan and sugar, hardly conducive to a healthy diet. And the "wicked stepmother" does not reflect how society is enriched by today's diverse range of family types. And surely you can't go around pushing witches into the oven, can you? A hate crime at the very least.

Then there's Little Red Riding Hood. I mean what sort of mother allows their young daughter to go walking on her own through the woods? That's a surefire case of child neglect. And the bit about killing the wolf? Animal cruelty at the very least.

As for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, well where do we begin? Dwarfism, modern slavery, and it is sure to put children off getting their five a day. Just don't go there.

❒❒❒

NEW figures revealing how much money local councils make from car parking charges make fascinating reading.

Dudley Council took £435,000 last year, Sandwell Council £430,000, Walsall £492,000 and Wolverhampton £1.4 million. Sounds a lot but look at it another way. The figures amount to £1.40 per head per year in Dudley and Sandwell, about £1.80 a year in Walsall and about £5.50 in Wolverhampton. Given the choice, I'm sure most people would sooner pay an extra couple of quid a year on the council tax than have to fiddle with a pay-and-display meter every time they go shopping, and stress over whether their ticket will expire before the baddie in the silly uniform comes round to dish out the fines.

The £435,000 Dudley made is also little more than a seventh of the money the council spent on the questionable market place refurbishment a few years ago.

The landlord is no longer there to sort things out

Meghan Markle – majority of the public don't care about her being mixed-race

Dame Glynis Breakwell's downfall is an object lesson in the power of free speech

Dickensian – the second-best costume drama the BBC has ever made but too brief

Housing ladder can lead to new troubles

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

THERE is a myth among millennials that once you are on the housing ladder all your troubles end. So it was illuminating to come across a column a few days ago by a first-time buyer who admits: "When it's your name on the mortgage, the buck stops with you . . . you'll never have any money ever again." There followed a bleak tale of things going wrong and a dodgy tradesman relieving him of £1,000. That's how it is, kids. Owning your own place brings some security but much expense, and the words "the landlord will sort it out" vanish like a comfort blanket chucked in a bin.

A READER tells me he has heard one American reporter referring to "Prince Hairy." Expect more of the same. The US and UK are two nations divided by a common language. The Yanks also have a strange approach to names. On a trip to Texas in the 1980s, I had great difficulty convincing our hosts that no-one in England ever referred to the Prince of Wales and his wife as Chuck and Di.

AM I hopelessly out of touch, or am I right in thinking that the vast majority of the Great British Public don't give a flying fig about Meghan Markle being mixed-race? We have surely moved on from all this. We may not yet be the ultimate colour-blind society but we are getting there. So what possible motive lies behind an outburst such as this, from the Guardian, that greeted Monday's engagement announcement: "From Victoria and Abdul to Harry and Meghan Markle, our society is still obsessed with 'purity' and is shocked that a royal could marry a person of colour." I'm not sure what the Guardian means by "our society" or "purity" but it's not the society I recognise and it's not the society where I and most Brits live, or would wish to live.

THE Church of Sweden is urging its clergy to use gender-neutral language and avoid referring to God as "He." There is a tiny theological problem here, namely that Jesus repeatedly refers to God as male. I haven't counted this myself but I am told in John's Gospel alone, Jesus calls God "Father" no fewer than 156 times, which seems pretty conclusive. Still, when the gender-police are in full cry, who would dare to suggest that the New Testament might be gospel?

YOU can get away with being paid £486,000 a year if you work in a bank or stock exchange where everybody else earns £486,000. You will stride together in one vast, elevated herd, like giraffes on the savannah. However, if you are earning £486,000 and everyone around you earns a tiny fraction of that amount, you become like one isolated giraffe in a herd of snappy little mongooses (mongeese?). Eventually, the little creatures will gang up on you, bite your ankles and bring you crashing down. Dame Glynis Breakwell has quit as vice-chancellor at the University of Bath. Her downfall is an object lesson in the awesome power of free speech, a free press, natural justice and, above all, envy. I predict a sudden drop in the number of vice-chancellors asking for a wage rise.

BUT don't shed too many tears. Breakwell is not resigning in the sense that you or I might understand. She will not stand down until next August and will then spend the following six months on what you and I call a paid holiday but academia calls a sabbatical.

THE Government was apparently surprised at the initial lack of outrage about Britain having to pay £50 billion or so to leave the EU. I suspect this is because many years of indifferent education have created a nation which doesn't really know what 50 billion is. Adding to the confusion is the fact that many older folk were taught in their schooldays that a billion was a million million. So own up. Is 50 billion 50,000,000,000, 50,000,000 or 50,000,000,000,000? And how many million zeros can you get on the side of a bus?

DICKENSIAN, screened over the last festive period, was probably the second-best costume drama the BBC has ever made. Its only flaw was to be shown in brief 30-minute episodes which hardly gave you time to settle down with a glass of porter and a muffin to enjoy the Victorian ambience. Netflix is now reshowing the series but has edited them into chunky and very satisfying one-hour episodes. Excellent.

TALKING POINT

Just one tweet away from the vilest abuse

THE internet has transformed society since we said farewell to the 20th century, but at what cost?

Has social media made Britain a more cohesive country? Have we entered a new golden age where reunited friends and digitally connected communities work for the common good?

Or have we plummeted into a new dark age inhabited by hate-filled trolls, Z-list bloggers and clickbait content that appeals to the darker impulses.

If you use social media you are only ever one ill-judged Tweet away from a torrent of hate from those who seek the slightest pretext, usually an expression of opinion they do not agree with, to spew out the vilest abuse and threats.

Pornography has become easily available and degraded many. Yes, there are parental controls, but any curious kid can get round those and it only takes one in a peer group to show such images to their mates. It's actually changed the mainstream, so programmes like Love Island can flourish and some think it's actually funny to buy their pre-teen daughter a T-shirt with the slogan Future Porn Star.

The new Wiki-world offering a wealth of free information was supposed to make us better informed but instead many seem content to live in a bubble, only listening to views that chime with their own opinions and prejudices.

Meanwhile, the Tweeter in chief, a self-promoting self-obsessed New York property developer whose brand was enhanced by a reality TV show, has been propelled into the White House by a wave of hyperlinked hyperbole – allegedly with the help of considerable social media manipulation from the Kremlin. Trump is the ultimate icon of this new age of narcissism.

Take a look around... families sat at dinner tables staring at their phones rather than speaking to each other, people apparently talking to themselves whilst walking down the street, even having animated loud arguments with people who are not physically present. It looks weird because it is weird.

Meanwhile, the internet giants get richer by stealing your information, dodging taxes and siphoning away revenue from traditional media (including local newspapers).

I know you can't put the digital genie back in the bottle but we've got to consider where this is taking us before Trump is trumped by something even more dangerous.

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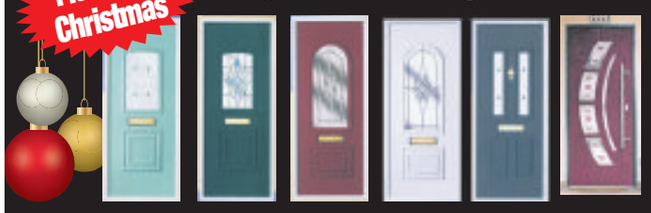
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Trains would be more useful than trams

COUNCILLORPATRICK Harley, leader of Dudley Council, said: "This is a real game changer for Dudley – the Metro is vital to the town and the borough's economy."

It is indeed a game changer to put slow 'bus on rails' trams on the UK's last remaining, unused with 'everything is there bar the trains' principal main line railway.

Such stupidity has never been even attempted anywhere else in the world!

Millions to dig up the roads to move the cables and pipes before the tram tracks can be laid – to a ghost town on top of the hill.

Returning the trains to the UK's last, half completed, main line railway, linked to electric buses (not trams), would be more fiscally responsible, quicker to achieve and help many more people.

Dudley town centre has moved to Castle Gate – exactly where the much-needed main line railway station sits – with the innovation centre soon to be put on top. This is the only feasible site for the railway station. Yet more road and railway congestion as another station bites the dust!

The UK lacks capacity on its railway network because the thoughtless and inept transport bosses have been spending decades turning them into roads, for retail, housing estates and industrial units. Since the 1990s, even putting trams on 20kms to destroy 3kms of urban double track railway line and one of Wolverhampton's main line stations!

Our stupid transport bosses and planners have been doing the equivalent of putting London Underground trains on the London to Paris HS1 line! With us, it is a slow, local, frequent stopping, six trams an hour service, on only 6.7km out of 56km in the middle of a half completed 120km main line railway. But that prevents the fast, regional and national trains from ever returning, anytime soon, between now and the end of the world.

TIM WELLER
Halesowen

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST
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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL
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Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

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Motorists may have blue badge

SUBJECT parking outside Russells Hall Hospital

I refer to the letter by Peter Cole of Kingswinford (Chronicle, November 30).

I always look forward to reading his correspondence, but I can't see where he is coming from with regard to the inconsiderate parking he states, along the road outside the hospital.

He even goes on to say that cars parked there should be fined £200 and their cars crushed.

Surely Peter must realise that the motorists that park on the double yellow lines on this stretch of road are parking legally if they have a blue badge and that they park within the hours stated on the sign displayed on the footpath?

The traffic warden he saw was presumably checking that the cars were displaying the blue badge.

BOB WHITEHOUSE
Kingswinford

Remembrance pride

AS the retired Standard Bearer for Brierley Hill I would like to thank all those, old and young, who attended this year's parade and service at the cenotaph and church (St Michael's) on Remembrance Sunday. The attendance was remarkable and reflected what remembrance means to the people of Brierley Hill and district. The girls and boys with their leaders and team vicar Reverend Simon Archer were immaculate in dress and behaviour. Our sincere thanks go to the adult leaders and young members, members of the emergency services and to our new standard bearer (well done Stuart), also the bugler who turns up every year, and the church workers led by Reverend Archer.

RON GREENFIELD
Brierley Hill

In need of better managers

PRODUCTIVITY gap – here we go again! Britain is lagging behind our competitors in terms of industrial output per employee. So what does the Government suggest as a solution? More railways and motorways.

Considering the Conservatives' claim to be the party of business, they have no idea about boosting productivity. In any organisation, success starts at the top. Good management alone can boost output. We need fewer roads and railways and more good managers.

A manager's role is to create an environment of care and trust among employees. Employees respond to receiving respect, with hopes of gaining promotion through their capabilities. Too many managers seek to motivate by criticism and shouting, actions which cause low productivity.

MICHAEL CLIFF
Wall Heath

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Museum creates perfect mix for Christmas past

Sheila Chamberlain-Hyett mixes pastry for traditional mince pies at the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley

IT was the way they celebrated Christmas in an earlier era that still fills people with festive cheer today.

Thousands are flocking to the Black Country Living Museum on Tipton Road, Dudley, to sample the delights of an old-fashioned Christmas during the run-up to the big day.

Christmas in the Home – complete with Santa hunts – will run every Saturday and Sunday from now until December 24 and each day during the final week. There are also five Christmas evenings with the 2,000 tickets for each already sold out.

All the 300-a-day places on the hunt for Santa are also already filled with some being snapped up as long ago as July and August.

Staff in costumes and volunteers were at six different houses at the museum to tell stories about the character they played and display festive skills from Victorian times as the festive season got under way. These ranged from making plum pudding by wrapping mixed fruit, milk, eggs and flour in muslin and hanging it in bubbling water over a blazing fire for four hours through to dressing up a peg doll to producing a sweet-smelling pomander for the tree from an orange and cloves.

Sheila Chamberlain-Hyett, a demonstrator for three years, said: "The kids of today get loads of presents and it is important for them to know it has not always been like that at Christmas."

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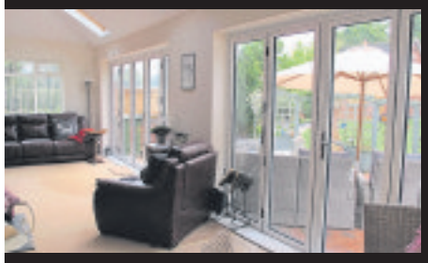

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Food campaign is right up his street

Coronation Street star Antony Cotton has joined the support for the Feed A Family campaign

CORONATION Street's Antony Cotton is among the latest names to back the Express & Star and Chronicles' Feed a Family This Christmas campaign.

The soap star, who has trod the cobbled streets of Weatherfield for a staggering 15 years as Sean Tully, was in Stourbridge to switch on the town's Christmas lights. Although, it didn't quite go to plan when the decorations came on a few seconds early.

But the busy star was happy to stick around for pictures with his fans and take a moment to support our appeal before being whisked away towards his next destination.

The campaign is aiming to donate thousands of non-perishable items to food banks in Staffordshire and the Black Country, with more and more regular families having to turn to them just to get by. Last year, when we launched the drive, more than 9,000 items were generously donated by readers. Unsurprisingly celebrities have not hesitated to offer their backing for the scheme and this year has been no different.

THE DROP-OFF POINTS:

Express & Star Wolverhampton, 51-53 Queen Street, WV1 1ES; Express & Star Cannock/Walsall office, Queen Square, Cannock WS11 1EA; Oldbury office, Black Country House, Rounds Green Road, Oldbury, B69 2DG.

DONATIONS CAN ALSO BE DROPPED OFF AT:

Waitrose Wolverhampton, Penn Road, WV2 4NJ; The Midcounties Co-operative Food Store Codsall, 28-32 Wood Lane/Bakers Way, Codsall WV8 1DB. Donations dropped off at those will go to The Well.

Slade guitarist Dave Hill, The Vamps, antiques guru Will Farmer and GB gold medallist Joe Clarke have all lent their faces to the cause in recent weeks.

While former Emmerdale actress Lisa Riley, featuring in this year's pantomime at the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre – Jack and the Beanstalk, has been joined by co-stars of the production Ian Adams and Adam C Booth in showing support.

The items will be donated to The Well (Home of Wolverhampton Food Bank), Wolverhampton's the Good Shepherd Ministry, the Black Country Food Bank, the Smethwick Food Bank, Walsall North Food Bank and Cannock and District Food Bank, while domestic violence support charity The Haven will also benefit.

People have until December 16 to donate.

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Pupils are flying high as aircraft project takes off

The Coyote plan, made by pupils from Ormiston New Academy, takes to the skies over Halfpenny Green

THERE were cheers of victory as a five-year academy project came to a soaring finish.

Students from Ormiston New Academy in Wolverhampton flocked to Halfpenny Green Airport to see their 'build-a-plane' project 'coyote' take off.

Pilot Graham Wiley flew the RANS Coyote II light aircraft high above the many who had worked hard to see the two-seater 30ft wingspan aeroplane's completion back in August.

English and photography teacher Tina Wootton, who has been at the academy for six years, said: "It's been fantastic for our students, it's been a very hands on experience for them.

"It's sad because it's the end of an era that's been going on for so long – as a teacher it's brought me closer to my students. I've built a relationship up with these kids through the build a plane project, I've been with them not only watching them do the build, I've been on trips with them to light aviation seminars, we've gone to different air shows which has been fantastic.

Eveanne Parsons, aged 16, with pilot Graham Wiley

"I've actually watched my students grow with confidence and become more independent and more mature and just wonderful well-rounded human beings."

Year 11 student Eveanna Parsons, who joined the project three years ago, helped to build the aircraft from a kit as part of the Royal Aeronautical Society and Boeing's Schools Build-a-Plane Challenge.

The 16-year-old said: "Before joining the project I knew nothing about engineering, I didn't even know the career path I wanted to take. Through the project, it changed my whole point of view about engineering, I went on school trips and did exhibitions.

"We went to Parliament to look at women in aviation. I met a few cadets there, I didn't even know Air Cadets was a thing.

"I talked to them and a few weeks later I joined the cadets and I've just had so many experiences, I've been flying – it was the best experience of my life so far."

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Something for everyone at city's literary festival

STARS from Slade, Magnum and Only Fools and Horses are among the names lined up for the second Wolverhampton Literature Festival.

Headlining the three-day festival in January is award-winning writer Will Self as exclusively revealed in The Chronicle.

But now the full programme has been revealed and boasts such famous names as Slade drummer Don Powell, Magnum keyboardist Mark Stanway, Only Fools and Horses actor John Challis and author Lynsey Hanley.

More than 80 events are taking place at venues across the city including Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Newhampton Arts Centre, The Slade Rooms, Bantock House and The Grand Theatre.

Themes

Three themes are running through the festival – music and literature, politics and journalism and community voices. With something for everyone there is set to be workshops, theatrical performances, debates and events for children.

The first Wolverhampton Literature Festival was held in January this year, headlined by author and journalist Sathnam Sanghera, and proved a huge success.

The aim is to build the event over the next five years and make it a permanent fixture in the calendar, after receiving Arts Council England funding up to 2022.

Wolverhampon Council is working in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton and Express & Star on the festival.

For details of the full line-up visit www.wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk

It's thumbs up as festivalgoers can hear about the history of Slade

Magnum's Mark Stanway to give talk

Only Fools and Horses' John Challis

Story contest is sheer poetry

BUDDING writers have a chance to be part of a Black Country literature festival. A short story writing competition has been launched as part of the Wolverhampton Literature Festival with the winner read out at the event.

Sister paper the Express & Star last week launched the competition. Judges will decide the winner, with the story printed in the paper. It will be read out at the festival by award-winning local author Paul Dowswell.

To enter writers can submit a story on any subject of around 1,200 words. It must be an original piece of fiction and not an account of real events. Deadline is January 6. Email your short stories to karen.baker@expressandstar.co.uk or post them to Editor's Secretary Karen Baker, Express & Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

That competition is for over 16s although a Young Authors competition is running for key stage 2 and 3 pupilsThe winners will be turned into stage productions performed during the festival.There is also a poetry competition with a £400 first prize with the theme 'Out of darkness cometh light'. The winner will have the opportunity to read at a festival event.

Sweet talk from guest chocolatier

Wordsley 'M' TG

CHAIRMAN Liz Hubbard opened the November meeting and welcomed members and visitors before the October minutes were signed.

Details of a craft morning at Norton Community Centre were given and a musical afternoon at The Oakfield Community Centre, Brettell Lane will take place on February 21 at 2pm.

The first Lunch Club outing of the new year will be at The Bell, Kingswinford on January 8. Coffee mornings will resume in February.

At the Community Centre Christmas bazaar on Saturday, Wordsley TG will run a chocolate prize every time stall.

Liz then introduced the speaker, chocolatier Jackie Smith who gave a very interesting and detailed talk and demonstration on the history, development and trading of the paste from the ground cacao seed.

Samples were handed round and a demonstration took place with Liz giving a hand in making chocolate lollipops! Liz gave the vote of thank for a very entertaining talk.

The next Guild meeting is on December 11 at 10am when Kath Reynolds will give a talk entitled 'Tis the Season to be Jolly where everyone can reminisce over Christmases past, the traditions, celebrations, favourite toys, cracker jokes etc. Meetings are at Wordsley Green Community Centre. Cost for visitors is £3 including refreshments.

History given of Real Dad's Army

Amblecote History Society

RAY Sturdy spoke at the November meeting on the Real Dad's Army. Ray was fortunate to inherit a diary his uncle kept during his time as a volunteer in the London area which he related memories as a Local Defence Volunteer.

On May 14, 1940, Anthony Eden announced the formation of the LDV. Some 250,000 men aged between 17 and 65 who were not engaged in military service, volunteered – hence the nickname Dad's Army. LDV was renamed the Home Guard by Winston Churchill on July 22, 1940.

Ray kindly donated his fee to cancer research.

The next meeting is the Christmas social, which includes light festive refreshments on December 13. Keeping to a complete Christmas theme, the group welcomes Mary Bodfish for an illustrated presentation on 'From Christmas Past to Christmas Present'.

The meeting is in The Furnace Theatre at the Ruskin Glasshouse Centre, Amblecote at 7.30pm. Visitors are welcome for the small charge of just £2.

Getting crafty for sensory bands

Sedgley Morning TG

Margaret Morgan, Maureen Hall and Gaynor Ormerod

THE guild is supporting Alzheimer's Society as its charity of the year, and members have been busily knitting sensory bands.

These are sleeves that have attachments added to them and are used to calm patients with dementia or Alzheimer's by giving them something to do with their hands.

Federation's carol concert

West Midlands Federation

WEST Midlands Federation of Townswomen holds its carol service at St Thomas's Church, Market Street, Stourbridge, at 2.15pm on Saturday.

This will be attended by the Lady Mayoress of Dudley, Mrs Barbara Tyler. Invited guests will include National Trustee Jane Dayus Hinch and West Midlands Federation President Christine Yorke. Organist James Lloyd Thomas will give a recital of seasonal music and Wollaston Guild choir will give a performance of carols with soloist Anne Tomlinson.

Wills were a way to raise £2k at hospice

AN INITIATIVE known as Wills Month has raised at least £2,500 throughout November for the Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge.

Last month staff at Wall James Chappell and King Will's Wills have been offering discounted will-writing services, with half of all the money raised being donated to the hospice. More than 50 single and double wills were written for local people keen to support the hospice.

Sevvy Hassan, Founder, King Will's Wills, said: "Mary Stevens Hospice is a fantastic institution which serves the people of this area in such an incredible way during their time of need.

Consider

"The nature of getting a bit older or facing a life-limiting illness is that it can often force us to consider our future and the future of our loved ones. If we can provide peace of mind for someone by ensuring their will is up-to-date while also supporting a fantastic organisation like the hospice then we're delighted to do so."

James Rousell, Partner, Wall James Chappell, said: "We're delighted by the response to the initiative and by the amount we've been able to raise for families at the hospice, which is a cause that our organisation has supported passionately for many years."

Woman was trapped in car after accident

A WOMAN was taken to hospital after being trapped in a car following a crash near Kinver.

The incident happened on Dunsley Road, between Kinver and Stourton, just before 7.30pm on Saturday. Fire crews from Dudley and Wombourne attended and the woman was taken by ambulance to Russells Hall Hospital.

Alert on vaccinations after increase in cases of measles

PARENTS are being urged to check that they, their children and teenagers have had two doses of MMR vaccine following confirmation of cases of measles in the West Midlands.

Public Health England is working with councils and local NHS partners to make sure that anyone who needs an MMR vaccination is aware. Most of the recent cases reported had not received the required two doses of the MMR vaccine.

Consultant in Health Protection with Public Health England West Midlands, Dr Bharat Sibal, said those affected were all recovering but it was important to be aware that measles could be a very serious illness and lead to severe complications, especially in people who were particularly vulnerable or had other health conditions.

He said: "Measles is a highly-infectious viral illness. If you think you could have measles, it is really important to stay away from areas where you could come into contact with lots of other people – especially vulnerable patients in hospitals, care homes or other settings.

Symptoms

"I would urge anyone with symptoms to stay at home and phone their GP or NHS 111 for advice, rather than visiting the surgery or A&E, to prevent the illness spreading further. It is possible for anyone at any age to get measles and the illness can be more severe in teenagers and adults than in young children."

Public Health England has reported an increase in measles across the country over the year.

Dr Sibal added: "The free MMR vaccine is a safe and effective way of protecting against measles, as well as mumps and rubella. It's particularly important for parents to take up the offer of MMR vaccination for their children when offered at one year of age and as a pre-school booster at three years four months of age."

Man dies after Netherton house fire

An investigation is under way after a man died after a house fire that happened in Netherton on Friday

A MAN died after a blaze broke out at a terraced house in Netherton.

The victim was dragged out of the property in Blackbrook Road on Friday by firefighters who tried to resuscitate him at the scene.

But the victim, thought to be aged in his 40s, was pronounced dead shortly afterwards. It is not yet known how the fire started and an investigation is under way after the damaged property was cordoned off.

West Midlands Fire Service spokesman Neil Spencer said: "Firefighters went into the property wearing breathing apparatus and rescued a man from the downstairs. The same firefighters tried to resuscitate him and unfortunately their efforts were in vain."

West Midlands Ambulance Service's Claire Brown said: "The fire service found one patient inside the property who was in cardiac arrest. Sadly, nothing could be done to save the patient and they were confirmed dead on scene."

Singer has a home city concert date

ACCLAIMED Wolverhampton singer-songwriter Dan Whitehouse will be back for a homecoming concert at Newhampton Arts Centre on Sunday, December 17.

Dan, who released his fourth album That's Where I Belong last year, will be performing with a band and is being supported by The Little Unsaid and Matt Sayers.

The seated concert starts at 7.30pm and tickets cost £10.

The 38-year-old musician will be returning to the Newhampton in January as part of the city's Literary Festival to give a songwriting workshop.

See www.newhamptonarts.co.uk orwww.dan-whitehouse.com websites.

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Can't stop smiling!

How chef to rich and famous found 'ingredients' for a new life

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ATTRACTIVE, bubbly, confident and with a contagious laugh – there are simply not enough descriptive words to capture in a single sentence the experience of meeting professional chef, Jacky Standish.

Looking younger than her 57 years, Jacky has engaged on an unusual "bucket list", though she's quick to point out: "I'm definitely not dying. Quite the opposite!"

For the dog-lover, who confesses "she doesn't know who to smile at first," the list all about making up for lost time.

It's hard to imagine, this woman who laughs easily and is generous with her smiles, would ever want for anything, but reflecting on recent years she admits "there's plenty of catching up to be done."

Relaxing over a coffee, the former chef and house manager to Hagley Hall's Lord and Lady Cobham, explains that enduring decades of teeth troubles left her battling with some very dark days before receiving implant treatment at North Street Dental and Implant Clinic in Dudley.

"I was deeply ashamed of my teeth. I could cook fabulous meals for the rich and famous who regularly visited the hall. But for my own pleasure with food, it was becoming a nightmare as I found it more and more difficult to eat the meals I prepared.

"My bucket list . . . all the places I want to eat out," she muses, "and I just might cook at home and throw a dinner party . . . that sounds terribly old fashioned, doesn't it," she adds.

"I always used to find meals out with family and friends quite daunting and felt my presence compromised those with whom I was out. Of course, they'd have to find a restaurant with a menu offering something I could chew," Jacky says.

> "I could be helped, *I could be free from pain,* I could be transformed, *I could have closure...*"
>
> Jacqueline Standish Nov. 2017

Jacky, suffered with periodontal (gum) disease for decades. "I was informed by my family dentist I would experience dental issues throughout my life.

"At one point I was attending the dentists every three months to try and control the problems, but no matter how I tried, as the years passed I lost more and more teeth," she recalls.

visit www.denture-clinic.co.uk and follow the link to view Jacky's 'reveal' videos

A transformed Jacqueline showing off her beautifully crafted new smile with her pre-treatment look inset

Jacky's confidence plummeted so badly she would walk her dog at 5am to avoid meeting people. "By my mid-50s the erosion on my confidence was as severe as the erosion on my gums," she says,

Now, with four implants retaining an upper overdenture and a partial lower traditional prosthetic, she's thrilled with her new smile. "No-one would ever know they are not my natural teeth. Out with my dog, I can now speak to people and ask 'what sort of dog have you got on your lead?'"

Now look at me!

Jacky, who recently renovated her newly-purchased bungalow, adds: "Everything was finished except a makeover of the front garden. I could have paid to have it done, but decided to invest in my teeth. It was no good having a front garden when you have no front teeth." The surgery was carried out by North Street's implant dentist Owain Rees BDS DGDP (UK) Dip Imp Dent (UCL) GDC 61576.

Summing up her experience Jacky concluded: "I wake up feeling remarkably good, my jaw sore from all the smiling. I came for an initial consultation with Steven [practice principal Steven Burchell Dip CDT RCS Eng GDC 108353] and I could hardly lift my head up.

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Traditional jolly holly fun at candlelit Christmas

Museum staff Alison Hyatt and Anne Willetts get ready for the Candelit Christmas at Haden Hill House and Old Hall

STAFF and volunteers at a popular Black Country attraction have been decking the halls with holly and ivy ready for the annual candlelit Christmas event which takes place tonight (Thursday).

The event at Haden Hill House Museum and Haden Old Hall in Cradley Heath is from 6.30pm to 8.30pm.

"It has become a festive favourite and part of many local people's Christmas traditions," said Anne Willetts, visitor services assistant at the house. "Visitors can turn up and enjoy both beautiful houses dressed for the season and bathed in candlelight.

"In the Victorian house the dining table will be laid ready for Christmas dinner and lit with beautiful candelabras and visitors can join in the Christmas sing-a-long in the drawing room, or help the servants make paper chains for the servants' quarters."

Meanwhile, in the 17th Century Old Hall visitors can enjoy real greenery and a Tudor Christmas with old fashioned festivities.

"It is a fantastic way to forget the chaos of Christmas shopping and just relax into the festive season with some traditional Christmas cheer," added Alison Hyatt, Visitor Services Officer.

Light festive refreshments available will be available in the tearoom, courtesy of The Friends of Haden Hill Estate.

The event costs £3 to both houses or £2 concessions and there is no need to book.

There is also a family fun day on December 17 from 11am to 3pm.

For more information visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/joinin museums

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Schoolgirl became the mayor for a day

A TEENAGER became the Mayor of Dudley for a day as part of this year's Takeover Challenge.

Ruby Norgrove, aged 13, from Hagley, became the first ever non-mayor to wear the chains of office in the parlour at Dudley Council House.

The Takeover Challenge encourages organisations across the country to open their doors to children and young people to take over adult roles. This year, in Dudley, there were 40 young people taking part over a two-week period, and 17 were taking on roles at Dudley Council.

These included the jobs of cabinet member for children's services, Councillor Anne Millward, and deputy chief executive Tony Oakman.

Others have had a taste of other prominent roles, including that of local MPs, police and fire chiefs.

Ruby, who wants to become a dog handler in the RAF after leaving school, met the Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Dave Tyler, and Mayoress Barbara Tyler. The teenager, who attends Earls High in Halesowen, accompanied the mayor and mayoress on their official duties for the day. This included visits to Dudley Zoo and a local primary school, and a citizenship ceremony.

Councillor Tyler, said: "I was delighted to hand the chains over to Ruby for the day, it's about time I had a break! In all seriousness, it was a pleasure to have her join us on a day of engagements to learn a bit more about what the mayor does.

"She was a lovely girl and both myself and the mayoress wish her all the best in her future endeavours."

The Takeover Challenge, launched in 2007 by the Children's Commissoner, puts young people into decision-making positions and encourages organisations and businesses to hear their views.

Children gain an insight into the adult world and gain experience of a workplace, while organisations benefit from a fresh perspective.

Ruby Norgrove, aged 13, from Hagley, with Dudley Mayor and Mayoress, Dave and Barbara Tyler

Borough youngsters buck trend against having part-time job

A Black Country borough is one of the top areas for children with part-time jobs – although the number of youngsters across the country who work alongside their studies has fallen by a fifth in the past five years, it has been reported.

According to figures obtained by the BBC, the number of child employment permits issued by councils in the UK has declined steadily between 2012 and 2016.

More than 140 local authorities responded to Freedom of Information requests, which revealed that 29,498 permits were issued in 2012, compared to just 23,071 in 2016. Employers must apply for these permits in order to hire staff between the ages of 13 and 15.

Dudley and Norfolk were the top areas for children with part-time jobs. According to the figures, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council issued 471 permits, the equivalent to 4.4 per cent of 13 to 15-year-olds. Norfolk County Council issued 1,376 permits in 2016, equivalent to 5.2 per cent of children aged 13 to 15.

Dr Angus Holford, of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, said that pressure to do well at school could be to blame for the drop in numbers. He said: "Passing the exams you need now is looming larger in people's concerns."

Lorry driver is jailed over M6 horror crash

A LORRY driver from Dudley who caused devastating injuries to a driver after ploughing into the back of his car has been jailed for two-and-a-half years.

Andrew Hallbrook failed to slow down approaching a tailback on the M6 and smashed into the back of Martin Brannigan's Vauxhall Insignia.

The car was pushed under the trailer of a flatbed lorry in front with such force that the lorry hit another car and forced it into a fifth vehicle.

Andrew Hallbrook

Mr Branningan, aged 56, from Sutton Coldfield, has been left paralysed from the shoulders down following the crash near junction 2 of the M6 on March 24.

Hallbrook, 45, of Donnington Court, pleaded guilty to causing serious injury by driving dangerously in October. At Warwick Crown Court on Friday he was jailed for two-and-a-half years and banned from driving for three years.

Prosecutor Adam Western said that according to collision expert Dean Spencer, Hallbrook was doing 55mph as he approached the queue and only braked 12 metres before the point of impact at 49mph.

Spinal

Mr Brannigan suffered damage to his spinal cord, was in hospital for seven months and is now paralysed from the shoulders down and is at risk of developing infections and osteoporosis.

Hallbrook, who was working for an agency and had not driven that vehicle before, claimed he had been momentarily blinded by the sun and he had reached for the sun visor before suddenly realising the vehicles ahead had braked. But his account was not supported by the other truck driver or the accident investigator.

Mr Brannigan, an engineer, married with two children, said: "My injuries mean I will never walk again, which is devastating to me and to my family." His wife Julie, added: "Every ounce of his dignity is taken away. As his wife, emotionally it has destroyed me.

"What I will miss most from my husband is a hug, a kiss and a cuddle. This breaks my heart."

Earl Pinnock, defending, said Hallbrook, had spent 25 years as a carer as well as being a foster carer.

Judge Sylvia de Bertodano said: "Traffic was slowing down as a queue formed for a junction, and there were warning on overhead gantries for a mile and a half, as well as cars in front slowing down, with brake lights going on.

"But you, for whatever reason, failed to notice either those warning signs or the slowing of the cars in front until right at the last moment, as a result of which you were unable to reduce your speed by more than 6mph before impact.

"I don't accept for a minute that this was momentary inadvertence."

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Christmas comes to Brierley Hill

There'll be entertainment, music, fun and a visit from Santa at the Brierley Hill lights switch-on event next week.

The community event, which runs from 10am - 5pm on Saturday 9 December has been organised with the help of Dudley Council, Dudley CVS, Brierley Hill Civic, Brierley Hill Traders and The Brier Fair.

There will be activities throughout the town centre. The Moor Centre will be home to a Christmas craft market featuring handmade gifts and goodies.

There will be children's fairground rides and face painting to keep the youngsters entertained (small charge for both activities).

Youngsters can meet Father Christmas who will be setting up his grotto in the indoor market, the perfect place for parents to pick up veggies for their Christmas dinner and do a spot of Christmas shopping.

Last year's fun woolly sheep trail which saw toy sheep placed in shop windows and free woolly pop-pom sheep dotted around the town will turn into a knitted star trail for youngsters.

There will be live entertainment throughout the day. Performers from Code Red who entertained shoppers at Halesowen's Christmas light switch on will be walking around the town performing character roles, acrobatics, stilt-walking and fire-breathing. The group will bring the event to a close with a spectacular fire show finale after the light switch on at 5pm.

There will be entertainment on the main stage from noon, including a drumming performance from the 2156 squadron Air Training Corps, musical performances by Ricky Dee, Bromley Pensnett Primary School will be entertaining the crowds with carols and songs. Brierley Hill Musical Theatre Company is making a return to showcase their seasonal show. The Festival Community choir will be providing a range of seasonal and popular songs as the event builds to the light switch on itself at 5pm with the Mayor of Dudley and the winner of the week's 'Guess where the Elves area' facebook competition.

Councillor Dave Tyler, Mayor of Dudley, said: 'I enjoy all of the Christmas light switch-on events, they're a real focus for the community. I'd like to thank the traders, voluntary groups, businesses, churches and performers who have all come together to make this a true community Christmas.

'Brierley Hill has a lot of heart and I'm sure we'll see this at the event on Saturday. I can't wait.'

Dudley council has suspended car parking charges on its Brierley Hill car parks for the day in order to encourage more people into the town.

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Derek Barrett's photo shows the blacksmith at work

Gary Crutchley captured this shot of the fair

Robert Herringshaw pictured the hardware store

An atmospheric image of the bridge by Stacy Woolhouse for the cover

Tony Carwithen's image of the tram

Neil Brinsdon chose the colourful old fuel pumps

Museum's bostin' calendar

IT is one of the region's best loved and most photographed attractions. So to mark its 40th anniversary, the Black Country Living Museum fittingly launched a photo calendar competition to show the site at its finest.

Visitors were urged to snap their own bostin' shots of the museum and submit them for a 2018 calendar – to mark four decades since its opening. Now the calendar contest winners have been named – as have some of their stunning pictures of the Dudley museum in Tipton Road.

The winners have been revealed as Stacy Woolhouse, Derek Barrett, Tony Carwithen, Robert Herringshaw, Derek Barrett, Neil Brinsdon, Stephen Davis, Gary Portman, Stephen Davis, Gary Crutchley, Paul Lucas, and Roger Bowater.

Among the winning photos, are a picture of the museum's tramway and the iconic bridge that stretches across the canal basin. Atmospheric shots have also made the calendar, as well as expertly framed photos of some of the legion of BCLM volunteers – including a chainmaker and shop owner.

Unveiling the competition earlier this year, museum bosses said: "2018 is a very special year for us here at Black Country Living Museum; it marks 40 years since we opened our doors.

Inspiring

"We've had a great 40 years welcoming you into the inspiring stories of real people, their streets and homes, work and daily lives. To celebrate, we want to create a 2018 calendar compiled of photographs from our visitors."

The quality of the photos has been praised on the museum's Facebook page. Jenni Hodgetts said: "Brilliant pictures really captures the feel for the old Black Country," while Paul Cox posted: "Well done everyone, great quality photos well deserved."

The calendar is A4 and opens out to A3 with a hole for hanging. The months also carry the museum's special events dates. The calendar sells for £9.95. Visit bclm.co.uk website.

Safari park is still proving a roaring success

WEST Midland Safari Park continues to be a roaring success after posting another set of encouraging financial results.

Turnover grew for the fourth year running at the park, between Kidderminster and Bewdley.

For the 12 months to April, the company made a turnover of £17.8 million, up on last year's £17.5m. However, pre-tax profits dipped from £2.6m to £2.2m.

During the year revenue spend per visitor increased by 6.1 per cent while the average number of employees, including seasonal staff, increased from 437 to 493.

A statement said: "The directors are very pleased with the excellent financial performance during an improving economic environment for the leisure market.

"The business continues to show strong growth in earnings resulting from a policy of continuous investment and improvement of the visitor experience."

The 200-acre park, which opened in 1973, has around 600 animals and attracts more than 750,000 visitors a year. A new £1 million interactive ice age experience is set to open next year with highlights including a 26ft high 'volcano', an ice cave and life-sized animal exhibits. It follows the success of the £2.5m Land of the Living Dinosaurs.

Vinyl revival sees record sales grow

VINYL record sales are on the up at HMV shops, including those in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Brierley Hill.

Sales of vinyl records are on track to top 1.5 million this year, not bad for a format that was supposed to be killed off by CDs and downloads.

Vinyl album sales are back to a level of sales not achieved since the late 1980s with Ed Sheeran's Divide topping the year's vinyl chart.

Sales are strong across all genres including new releases and back catalogue titles.

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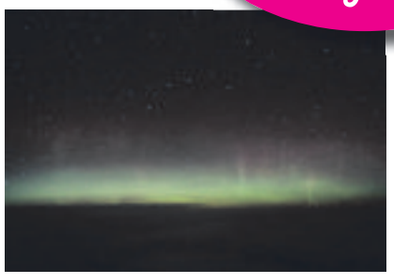

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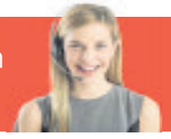

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It's challenging to play Cruella de Vil

There's Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk. And there's Peter Pan and Snow White. But those looking for something different for the festive season can head to Birmingham's REP, which is producing a unique version of The 101 Dalmatians.

Dalmatians Pongo and Missis enjoy an idyllic life with their humans, Mr and Mrs Dearly. Then one day, the house is filled with the patter of tiny paws when Missis gives birth to a litter of adorable puppies. But just as the Dearlys get used to their new housemates, the puppies mysteriously vanish.

With the help of the canine community and an Old English Sheepdog, Pongo and Missis set out on an adventure to find the missing puppies. Their quest leads them to the vicious Cruella de Vil. She hates dogs but loves fur coats and has set her sights on a certain black and white spotty pattern. Will the animals be able to get home safely in time for Christmas?

The new adaptation of Dodie Smith's delightful 1956 novel is the perfect festive treat and has been brilliantly transformed for the stage by Debbie Isitt, the writer and director of the hugely popular Nativity! films.

Tessa Walker has returned to direct the family favourite following her record-breaking 2015 production, The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe.

Gloria Onitiri, who plays Cruella, says audiences are in for a treat. The show opened at the end of November and will run until January 13.

"It's great. It's a real story, it's not just a fantasy panto, and it's based on a real piece of literature with lots of depth. People can expect a bit of a spectacle with plenty of morality and right and wrong. It's great."

EXCITING

Though the production is avowedly not a panto a few Christmas rules hold dear – first among them, that such shows only work when there's a great cast.

Gloria says: "Yes, we've got a ridiculously talented group of people on stage. It's a multi-faceted and diverse cast with puppeteers, musicians who play multiple instruments as well as great singers, dancers and actors. It's exciting. Without having to use lots of pyrotechnics – we don't have to 'Baz Luhrmann' it – we've created a genuine spectacle."

The dogs aren't real. Of course. Though Hollywood movie makers might be able to train 101 Dalmatians, the REP's production features an assortment of puppets.

Gloria laughs. "I think when I got cast if I'd have been told it was real dogs, I'd have said no. But the puppeteering works really well."

The actress, who has previously featured on TV's Doctors, Spamalot, Grass, Porgy and Bess and Bad Girls, enjoys playing the show's villain.

"Everybody knows the Disney version, but the great thing about Cruella is that she's human. She's had a whole life. So I've had to work out where she's come from and why she feels the way she does and why she is so mean and awful. What's she hiding underneath it all?

"For me, any character you play, you need to do that with. You need a 3D character. I like people who are challenging. Everyone else would say she's mad and she's mean – I would say she's challenging."

Gloria has enjoyed a fascinating career in which she's featured in everything from Jack and the Beanstalk to Taming of The Shrew and The Tempest. There have been plenty of classics – but she's mixed those with productions like The Lion King at The Lyceum.

"I don't think it's just because of the dice. I think the diversity has been because I sing as well. I just love a good story, whatever is there in front of me, I'll do it. I also think that by keeping myself as broad as I possibly can, my skills grow. It's about longevity and keeping my options open.

"I'm obsessed with language. I studied English at university and I'm obsessed with the root of things and how stories have changed, not just from English culture, but from all cultures. I've enjoyed Shakespeare – Shakespeare is the mothership. I featured at The Globe in Taming of the Shrew, which was phenomenal. There's a tradition that you have to wake up the stage before you start a show and we did a bit of drumming and all sorts and stood in the famous King's spot. It was the first time my cast had been on the stage and I burst into tears because it was so powerful and emotional. It just happened. I did not will it. It is an emotional space. There are parts of the stage you can do a speech and feel comedy will work."

Gloria is glad to be back home for 101 Dalmatians. She studied at University in Birmingham, leaving in 2006 and being too busy to return. "It's like visiting an old relative. I've felt wonderful being back here. The REP building is just astonishing and everyone is really kind."

The REP is getting into the charitable spirit during the show by creating a joint fundraising partnership with Hearing Dogs for Deaf People. The city centre theatre will be raising funds during the run of their production of The Hundred and One Dalmatians.

There are various fundraising activities planned during the run of the show, which will help to jointly fundraise towards Birmingham Repertory Theatre's million pound campaign REP First and the work of Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.

Twenty pence of every pound raised will go towards the work of Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, with the remainder going towards REP First initiatives, such as providing interpreters for the REP's youth theatre in order for Deaf children and young people to take part, as well as allowing the theatre to stage more accessible productions for people with a variety of additional support needs.

Tickets are available from the box office.

It's a dog's life – the cast in rehearsals with the puppets

The dogs in the play aren't real

Gloria Onitiri (Cruella De Vil)

● **For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.**

Jack And The Beanstalk cast

It's time for a great big Grand pantomime again – oh yes it is!

GRAND pantomime Jack And The Beanstalk opens on Saturday to delight family audiences in the Midlands throughout the festive season and beyond.

The show features returning favourites from last year's award-winning production of Aladdin – Lisa Riley, Doreen Tipton, Ian Adams and Adam C Booth – and joining them will be West End and Pop Idol star Gareth Gates as Jack.

Also on stage will be The Bill star Graham Cole as the evil Fleshcreep, musical theatre actress Sarah Vaughan as the Princess and Julie Paton will play The Harp. Also watch out for Daisy the Cow and a very hungry giant.

Lisa Riley captured the hearts of Wolverhampton as the Slave of the Ring in last year's pantomime and is back to play Mother Nature. Lisa is a regular panellist on ITV's Loose Women, wowed viewers with her twinkle-toes in Strictly Come Dancing and first found fame playing Mandy Dingle in the ITV soap Emmerdale.

Black Country internet sensation Doreen Tipton, as played by Walsall actress Gill Jordan, has graciously accepted the workload in appearing alongside Lisa as the Trot family's lazy next door neighbour. Doreen's original million hit YouTube viral success has blossomed into a series of theatre tours, a film featuring Robert Plant and Steve Bull, an autobiography – which somebody else had to write because she couldn't be bothered – and her own online comedy sketch channel called Doreen TV.

Ian Adams returns to the role of dame, Adam C Booth who received great critical acclaim as Wishee Washee last year will play Jack's brother Simple Simon and Graham Cole, best-known as PC Tony Stamp in The Bill, will be going from good cop to hissable villain.

Irish actress Sarah Vaughan, who stars alongside them as the Princess, has appeared in panto for producers Qdos Entertainment numerous times, most recently as Cinderella in High Wycombe alongside Louie Spence and Linda Robson last year.

Bradford-raised Gareth Gates was the runner-up to Will Young in the first series of Pop Idol and went on to find success in theatreland in such shows at Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Les Miserables, Legally Blonde and Footloose.

This year's panto will again be produced by Qdos Entertainment, the world's biggest pantomime producer and the same team behind the annual Grand panto for the last two decades. It is being directed by David Janson with choreography by Julie Paton.

The spectacular show will continue at the Grand until January 14.

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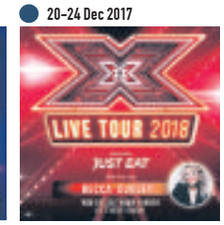

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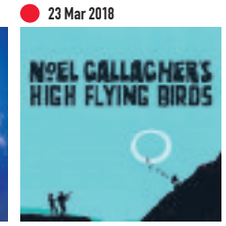

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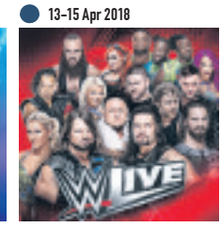

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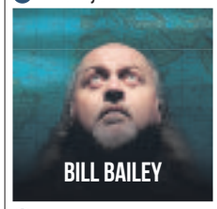

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Rock & roll with music legend Roy

It's party time with the I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday man... Roy Wood, pictured, brings his Rock & Roll Band to the Robin 2 in Bilston on Tuesday. The former Move and Wizzard hitmaker will be performing his hits, from Blackberry Way to See My Baby Jive, at this concert. Also at the Mount Pleasant venue tomorrow (Friday) will be a Northern Soul and Motown night featuring Angelo Starr, brother of late soul legend Edwin, and Lorraine Silver with the Edwin Starr Band.

Sacred and pop in festive concerts at Birmingham venues

Tomorrow evening (Friday) the City of Birmingham Choir present their annual performance of Handel's masterpiece Messiah at Symphony Hall, Birmingham.

It's Christmas with The Overtones at the same venue on Saturday night when the vocal group perform festive favourites, including White Christmas, Santa Claus Is Coming To Town and Let It Snow. Having firmly established themselves as the number one vocal harmony group in the UK, The Overtones – who were signed by a talent scout while working as decorators in a shop near Oxford Street – have sold over a million records and had five top five albums.

The Salvation Army are in concert twice at Symphony Hall on Sunday, at 2.30 and 6pm, and the That'll Be The Day Christmas Show will be rocking around the Christmas tree at Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday evening. The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, bring lunchtime Christmas music to Symphony Hall on Monday at 1pm, and in the evening the venue hosts the festive choral sounds of Harry Christophers and The Sixteen with Glory To The Christ Child.

See thsh.co.uk or call 0121 780 3333.

SATURDAY'S TV DECEMBER 9

CHOICE

John Noakes

John Noakes: TV Hero (BBC2, 5.30pm)
Documentary paying tribute to the life and career of John Noakes, the Blue Peter presenter and TV daredevil who died in May this year. Hearing from many of his colleagues and co-workers - both in front of and behind the cameras – along with friends and family, the programme sheds light on Noakes reputation as a 'man of action', cemented by stunts including climbing Nelson's Column without a harness, achieving a world-record breaking five mile free-fall, and risking life and limb on the Cresta Run. The film also illustrates how John hid his true personality behind his enthusiastic Blue Peter persona, considering himself to be an 'ordinary bloke' at heart.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** Nigella: At My Table. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Live Snooker: UK Championship. Coverage of the opening semi-final. **4.30** Final Score. **5.10** Len Goodman's Partners in Rhyme. **5.40** BBC News. **5.50** Regional Programme.

6.00 Pointless Celebrities. Jilly Goolden, Olly Smith, Sophie Grigson Michael Caines, Fay Maschler, Brian Turner, Cyrus Todiwala and Tony Singh compete in a "food and drink" edition of the unorthodox quiz. (R)

6.45 Strictly Come Dancing. The five remaining celebrities and their seasoned dancing partners reach the semi-final, and take to the stage in the studio to once again demonstrate their dancing skills. All the contestants face a two dances apiece as they try to win the favour of judges Shirley Ballas, Bruno Tonioli, Darcey Bussell and Craig Revel Horwood – and the viewers at home – if they are to be in with a chance of winning. Once the show is over, voting lines are opened, and fans are given a chance to have their say over who should make it to the final.

8.20 Michael McIntyre's Big Show. The comedian's Saturday night entertainment showcase continues, as celebrity couple and TV presenting duo Marvin and Rochelle Humes both hand over their phones for the show's first-ever double Send-to-All. Pop-rock outfit The Vamps perform on-stage, and Michael showcases some of his new material. Plus, an extra in an in-production advert suddenly finds himself under the spotlight as the Unexpected Star of the Show.

9.20 Casualty. Elle's unruly teenage son Blake gets involved in an off-licence robbery, and Max continues to make a bad impression on would-be sweetheart Polly.

10.10 BBC News; Weather.; National Lottery Update.

10.30 Match of the Day. Highlights from the Premier League, including West Ham United v Chelsea at the London Stadium and Newcastle United v Leicester City.

11.55 The NFL Show.

12.25 Film: Someone to Watch Over Me. (1987) **2.05** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.10** BBC News.

BBC2

6.15 Holiday of My Lifetime with Len Goodman. (R) **7.00** Nature's Weirdest Events. (R) **7.30** Naomi's Nightmares of Nature. **8.00** Deadly 60. (R) **8.30** Show Me What You're Made Of: UK. **9.00** Saturday Mash-Up! **11.00** Penguins on a Plane: Great Animal Moves. (R) **12.00** Raymond Blanc: How to Cook Well. (R) **12.30** Tom Kerridge's Best Ever Dishes. (R) **1.00** Demolition: The Wrecking Crew. (R) **2.00** Operation Snow Tiger. (R) **3.00** Escape to the Continent. (R) **4.00** Mastermind. (R) **4.30** Live Snooker: UK Championship. Further coverage of the opening semi-final. **5.30** John Noakes: TV Hero.

6.10 BP Confidential. Documentary charting Blue Peter's development from a typical children's magazine show into a national institution, and an important lynchpin in the BBC One schedule. Originally broadcast in 1998, as part of the show's 40th anniversary celebrations, the programme also reveals how taking the helm on Blue Peter often led to presenters and producers facing unexpected personal and professional pressures. (R)

7.00 Live Snooker: UK Championship. Coverage of the second semi-final on the 11th day at the Barbican Centre in York, as the prestigious ranking tournament continues. At this stage of last year's event, world number one Mark Selby dominated fellow Englishman Shaun Murphy, winning 6-2 to progress to a final against Ronnie O'Sullivan. Presented by Hazel Irvine, with a commentary team that includes Steve Davis, Ken Doherty, Stephen Hendry, John Parrott, Dennis Taylor and Peter Ebdon. Subsequent programmes subject to change.

10.00 Q! XL. Sara Pascoe, Colin Lane and Jimmy Carr join regular panellist Alan Davies and host Sandi Toksvig for an extended edition of the quiz show.

10.45 Insert Name Here. Comedy panel game in which host Sue Perkins asks teams captained by Richard Osman and Josh Widdicombe to answer questions about famous people who share a name. (R)

11.15 Film: The Cider House Rules. (1999) Drama, starring Tobey Maguire and Michael Caine.

1.10 Film: Borrowed Time. (2012) **2.40** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Mission Employable. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors. **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Fangbone. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.00** Scrambled!: Wishfart. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Saturday Morning with James Martin. **11.25** Gino's Italian Coastal Escape. (R) **11.50** The Hungry Sailors. (R) **12.50** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **1.15** ITV News; Weather. **1.25** The X Factor: Final. (R) **3.00** Endeavour. (R) **5.00** The Chase. (R)

6.00 Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs. The comedian follows the work of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home in London, meeting staff involved in treating, training and rehoming animals. (R)

6.25 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.35 ITV News; Weather.

6.50 You've Been Framed! Harry Hill narrates a comical selection of mishaps filmed by viewers, featuring everything from cute kids and crazy animals to pranks and painful-looking accidents.

7.15 Ninja Warrior UK. Ben Shephard, Rochelle Humes and Chris Kamara host the second semi-final, challenging more returning contestants to face the infamous obstacle course once again. (R)

8.20 I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! Ant and Dec present the celebrity survival challenge, as the famous faces' ordeal in the Australian jungle draws close to its conclusion. The pair offer viewers one last chance to catch up with the surviving contestants, all of whom will have their hearts set on being named King or Queen of the Jungle.

9.50 Through the Keyhole: I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! New series. The home-invading panel show returns with an "I'm A Celebrity..." special. With panellists Jimmy Carr, Stacey Solomon, Myleene Klass and Tony Blackburn.

10.50 ITV News; Weather.

11.05 Film: Shaun of the Dead. (2004) Comedy horror, with Simon Pegg.

12.50 Jackpot247. **3.00** The Hungry Sailors. (R) **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.05 Trail Running: Skyrunner World Series. **6.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.25** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.50** Frasier. (R) **8.15** Frasier. (R) **8.45** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **9.10** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **9.40** The Simpsons. (R) **10.10** The Simpsons. (R) **10.40** The Simpsons. (R) **11.10 Film:** 12 Dates of Christmas. (2011) Romantic fantasy, with Amy Smart and Mark-Paul Gosselaar. **12.55** Come Dine with Me. (R) **1.25** Come Dine with Me. (R) **1.55** Come Dine with Me. (R) **2.25** Come Dine with Me. (R) **3.00** Come Dine with Me. (R) **3.30** A Place in the Sun: Home or Away. (R) **4.30** Best Laid Plans. **5.30** Grand Designs. (R)

6.30 Channel 4 News.

7.00 Guy Martin's WWI Tank. The presenter builds a working replica of a First World War tank to mark the centenary of the Battle of Cambrai, and takes his tank driving test so he can take his creation on to the streets for Lincoln's Remembrance Day parade. He also delves into the history of the earliest armoured vehicles, the soldiers who crewed them, and the women who built them. (R)

9.00 Film: X-Men: Days of Future Past. (2014) In a future ravaged by war, the superhero team makes a desperate last stand against a force of deadly robots. Their only hope is to send Wolverine back in time to the 1970s, to join forces with an earlier version of the X-Men and change the events that started the conflict. Superhero adventure sequel, starring Hugh Jackman, Jennifer Lawrence, James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender.

11.35 Film: The Drop. (2014) A bartender who secretly works for gangsters gets involved in a robbery gone wrong that digs up long-buried secrets. Crime drama, starring Tom Hardy.

1.35 The Last Leg. Adam Hills, Josh Widdicombe and Alex Brooker are joined by another guest for a comic review of the significant moments of the past seven days. (R) **2.30** Hollyoaks. Omnibus. Prince and Sally help each other out, Cindy struggles to trust Dirk, and Sami is desperate to help James at work. **4.40** Location, Location, Location. Helping two first-time buyers in Manchester. (R) **5.35** Kirstie's Handmade Christmas. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.10** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **10.45** The Gadget Show. (R) **11.40** Cruising With Jane McDonald. **11.50 Film:** A Perfect Christmas List. (2014) **1.40 Film:** A Nutcracker Christmas. (2016) Premiere. Festive drama, starring Amy Acker. **3.20 Film:** Nativity 3: Dude, Where's My Donkey?! (2014) Premiere. Comedy sequel, starring Martin Clunes. **4.20** 5 News Update. **4.25 Film:** Nativity 3: Dude, Where's My Donkey?! (2014) Concluded. **5.35 Film:** The Family Man. (2000) Drama, starring Nicolas Cage.

6.35 5 News Update.

6.40 Film: The Family Man. (2000) Concluded.

7.55 5 News Weekend.

8.00 Santa Makes You Laugh Out Loud. Comedians Zoe Lyons, Ellie Taylor and Marlon Davis present a seasonal clip show featuring some of the funniest Christmas-themed videos currently doing the rounds online. Among the disastrous 'Santa fails', Christmas dinner disasters and grumpy dressed-up pets, the trio also highlight the stories behind popular yuletide videos, including the story of the bearded shopper who decided to play along when a three-year-old passer-by mistook him for Father Christmas, and Norman the bull mastiff, who hates Christmas and all associated songs. Narrated by Iain Lee. (R)

9.00 Football on 5: The Championship. Colin Murray introduces highlights from the weekend's games.

9.55 Football on 5: Goal Rush. Colin Murray introduces all the goals from the weekend's games in Leagues One and Two, including Peterborough United v Blackburn Rovers.

10.25 NCIS: New Orleans. The captain of a private yacht, along with a waiter, are murdered onboard the vessel, and the NCIS agents investigate when it emerges the boat belongs to a drug baron.

11.20 NCIS: New Orleans. Pride goes rogue to take down drug baron Garcia, and when his NCIS colleagues volunteer to help, he launches a undercover operation that could cost their careers – and their lives.

12.15 SuperCasino. **3.10 Film:** The Craigslist Killer. (2011) **4.40** Cruising With Jane McDonald. (R) **5.00** House Doctor. (R) **5.20** Wildlife SOS. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 Ancient Egypt: Life and Death in the Valley of the Kings **8.00** Kolkata with Sue Perkins **9.00** Witnesses: A Frozen Death **10.55** The Vietnam War **11.45** What a Performance! Pioneers of Popular Entertainment **12.45** Peaky Blinders **3.40** Close

ITV2

12.20 Take Me Out **1.35 Film:** Beethoven's Christmas Adventure (2011) **2.35** FYI Daily **2.40 Film:** Beethoven's Christmas Adventure (2011) **3.25** I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! **4.55 Film:** Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang (2010) **6.00** FYI Daily **6.05 Film:** Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang (2010) **7.10 Film:** The Amazing Spider-Man (2012) **8.10** FYI Daily **8.15 Film:** The Amazing Spider-Man (2012) **9.50** Family Guy **10.50** I'm a Celebrity: Extra Camp **11.50** Family Guy **12.20** American Dad! **1.20** Release the Hounds **2.15** Viral Tap **2.55** Teleshopping **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

12.35 Film: Columbo: Death Hits the Jackpot (1991) **2.40** Sherlock Holmes: The Last Vampyre **4.55** Agatha Christie's Marple **9.00** Grantchester **11.00** Blue Murder **1.05** Wycliffe **2.00** ITV3 Nightscreen **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV4

1.15 ITV Racing: Live from Sandown. Ed Chamberlin presents coverage of eight races. **4.00 Film:** The Dam Busters (1954) **5.00** FYI Daily **5.05 Film:** The Dam Busters (1954) **6.35 Film:** Live and Let Die (1973) **7.35** FYI Daily **7.40 Film:** Live and Let Die (1973) **9.00 Film:** Octopussy (1983) **10.00** FYI Daily **10.05 Film:** Octopussy (1983) **11.40 Film:** Renegades (1989) **12.40** FYI Daily **12.45 Film:** Renegades (1989) **1.50** Monster Carp **2.50** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping

E4

11.00 The Big Bang Theory **12.00 Film:** Marmaduke (2010) **1.45** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **2.00** The Goldbergs **4.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** The Impossible (2012) **11.10** Gogglebox **1.20** The Inbetweeners **2.25** Rude Tube **3.20** First Dates Hotel **4.15** How I Met Your Mother **4.55** Rules of Engagement

Film4

11.00 Miracle on 34th Street (1947) **1.00** Flight of the Navigator (1986) **2.45** Ramona and Beezus (2010) **4.50** The Two Faces of January (2014) **6.40** About Time (2013) **9.00** The Wolf of Wall Street (2013) **12.30** Underworld: Rise of the Lycans (2009) **2.15** Heart of a Dog (2015) **3.55** Close

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Matilda

This much-loved story is a must-see theatre show. Guinness Book of Records entry for the most Olivier Awards won by any show, Matilda the Musical was nominated in all ten categories in the 2012 Oliviers and broke a 20 year record by taking seven titles including Best New Musical, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Actress.

This RSC production of Roald Dahl's famous Matilda has wall to wall rave reviews, with sparkling writing by Dennis Kelly and outstanding songs by the singer/comedian/songwriter Tim Minchin. Enjoy Matilda the Musical at the Cambridge Theatre in London now!

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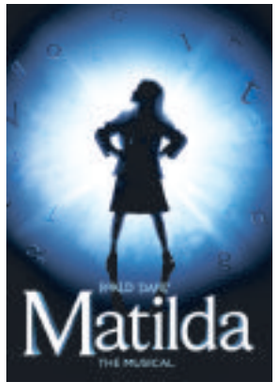

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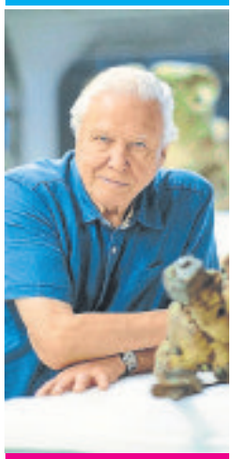
SUNDAY'S TV DECEMBER 10

CHOICE



David Attenborough

Attenborough and the Giant Elephant
(BBC1, 9pm)
The naturalist investigates the life of Jumbo, a famous Victorian elephant, supposedly the largest that ever lived. Jumbo arrived in London Zoo in 1865 and was popular with the royal family, but was dangerously unhappy in captivity. In later life, Jumbo would be sold to PT Barnum's circus, becoming a celebrity before dying under mysterious circumstances. Attenborough examines Jumbo's remains and considers the lives of elephants in the wild to learn more about the animal's difficult life.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.35** Match of the Day. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** Fern Britton Meets Barbara Dickson. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Escape to the Country. (R) **1.50** Mary Berry's Country House Secrets. (R) **2.50** Lifeline. **3.00** Songs of Praise. **3.35 Film:** Toy Story. (1995) Pixar animated adventure. **4.50** Blue Planet II. (R) **5.50** BBC News.

6.05 Regional Programme.

6.15 Countryfile. Ellie Harrison and Matt Baker present the show from the Norfolk-Suffolk border, discovering a conservation effort to save two species of animal found in the area that are on the brink of extinction. Ellie also meets a mother and daughter trying to make Ipswich safe for hedgehogs and Matt meets a farmer who has found a way to grow vegetables all year round. Plus, a shepherd-turned-artists, alpacas with an unusual job and a report on animal diseases.

7.15 Strictly Come Dancing: The Results. Claudia Winkleman and Tess Daly reveal the results of last night's viewers' vote, which will decide who is going through to next week's final.

8.00 Blue Planet II. The impact of humans on aquatic wildlife, from albatrosses unwittingly feeding their offspring plastic to communications between animals disrupted by noise. Last in the series.

9.00 Attenborough and the Giant Elephant. The naturalist investigates the life of a Victorian elephant, supposedly the largest that ever lived, that became famous at London zoo and as part of PT Barnum's circus.

10.00 BBC News.

10.20 Regional Programme.

10.30 Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the latest Premier League action, featuring Manchester United v Manchester City, Liverpool v Everton and Southampton v Arsenal.

11.35 The Women's Football Show. A look at the biggest issues in the women's game, focusing on matters at both club and international level.

12.10 Ronny Chieng: International Student. **12.40** Weather for the Week Ahead. **12.45** BBC News.

BBC2

6.05 Coast. (R) **7.05** Gardeners' World. (R) **7.35** The Secret History of the British Garden. (R) **8.35** Countryfile. (R) **9.30** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.00** Food & Drink. (R) **11.30** My Life on a Plate. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Live Snooker: UK Championship. Coverage of the opening session of the final from the Barbican Centre in York, as the tournament widely regarded as the second-most prestigious on the calendar continues. Subsequent programmes subject to change. **5.15** Ski Sunday.

6.15 Flog It! Antiques experts James Lewis and Caroline Hawley visit Wolverhampton Art Gallery where they assess aboriginal art and a 1920s tennis racket. Paul Martin presents. (R)

7.00 Live Snooker: UK Championship. Coverage of the second session of the final from the Barbican Centre in York, where the first player to reach 10 frames will be crowned champion. Mark Selby held his nerve to win the trophy here last year for the second time, holding off a comeback by Ronnie O'Sullivan to prevail 10-7. At 7-2 ahead the Jester from Leicester seemed set for a comfortable evening, but the Rocket closed the deficit to 8-7, before Selby clinched victory in style with two centuries to cement his place at the top of the world rankings. Presented by Hazel Irvine, with a commentary team that includes Steve Davis, Ken Doherty, Stephen Hendry, John Parrott, Dennis Taylor and Peter Ebdon.

11.00 Employable Me. Documentary following some of Britain's most extraordinary job seekers as they prove that having Tourette's syndrome or autism should not make them unemployable. (R)

12.00 Athletics: European Cross Country Highlights. Action from the annual championships, featuring the men's and women's races in Samorin, Slovakia. **1.05 Film:** Jo Nesbo's Headhunters. (2011) A corporate headhunter moonlights as a thief, but his latest robbery leads him to uncover a dangerous secret. Crime thriller, starring Aksel Hennie and Nikolaj Coster-Waldau. **2.40** Sign Zone: Question Time. Topical debate from Swansea, chaired by David Dimbleby, with panelists including Welsh Labour Party leader Carwyn Jones and TV and radio host Richard Bacon. (R) **3.40** Holby City. A new arrival in Holby sets the wheels of change in motion. (R) **4.40** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Mission Employable. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Ben 10. **8.10** Scrambled!: Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.30 Film:** Scrambled!: Scooby-Doo! Haunted Holidays. (2012) **9.00** Scrambled!: Wishfart. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Best Walks with a View with Julia Bradbury. (R) **9.55** The Martin Lewis Money Show. (R) **10.25** Save Money: Good Food. (R) **11.00** Tipping Point. (R) **12.00 Film:** Junior. (1994) Comedy, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. **2.05** ITV News; Weather. **2.15** You've Been Framed! Gold. (R) **2.45** Midsomer Murders. (R) **4.40** The Chase. (R) **5.35** How to Spend It Well at Christmas with Phillip Schofield. (R)

6.35 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.45 ITV News; Weather.

7.00 Ninja Warrior UK. Competitors from across the UK test their strength, speed and courage in this obstacle-course challenge. (R)

8.00 The Chase Celebrity Special. Sam Quek, Basil Brush, Andi Peters and Charlie Higson answer general knowledge questions and work as a team to secure a cash prize for charity. Presented by Bradley Walsh.

9.00 I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! Ant and Dec present the final of the 17th series, as the remaining famous faces take on one last round of gruelling challenges in the Australian jungle. Votes from the audience will decide who is this year's most popular contestant. Once the results are in and the viewers' choice has been revealed, they will be crowned as this year's King or Queen of the Jungle, before they and their fellow finalists make their escape from the jungle and begin their long-awaited journey back to the comforts of home. Last in the series.

10.35 ITV News; Weather.

10.50 Diamond Geezers and Gold Dealers. (R)

11.50 The Detectives: Inside the Major Crimes Team. (R)

12.40 Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.20 3rd Rock from the Sun. (R) **6.45** 3rd Rock from the Sun. (R) **7.10** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** Paul Hollywood: A Baker's Life. (R) **1.00 Film:** Evolution. (2001) Sci-fi comedy, starring David Duchovny. **3.00 Film:** The Sorcerer's Apprentice. (2010) Fantasy adventure, starring Nicolas Cage. **5.10** The Snowman. (R) **5.45** The Snowman and the Snowdog. (R)

6.10 Channel 4 News.

6.30 Britain's Wildest Weather 2017. Some of the UK's most unusual weather in the past year, including catastrophic flooding, tornadoes, lightning strikes and record-breaking storms. Featuring first-hand accounts and footage, and a look at the scientific explanations for these unusual conditions.

8.00 Coastal Railways with Julie Walters. The actress travels on the famous Great Western Railway to Cornwall. She recalls childhood holidays when she stops at Torquay before heading to a supposedly haunted castle at Kingswear. She also uncovers tales of smuggling and joins members of the RNLI on a practice run before visiting an unusual cake shop in Penzance.

9.00 Film: The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. (2015) Premiere. With the original Best Exotic Marigold Hotel a roaring success, owner Sonny decides the time is right to expand his business empire. But to do so, he and the rest of the residents must pull out all the stops to impress a potential investor's inspector – a task that proves to be easier said than done. Comedy drama sequel, with Dev Patel, Maggie Smith, Judi Dench and Richard Gere.

11.30 Film: Unbroken. (2014) An Olympic athlete serving in the Second World War survives being lost at sea and held in a brutal PoW camp. Fact-based drama, with Jack O'Connell and Domhnall Gleeson.

1.55 Film: Departure. (2015) Premiere. Drama, starring Juliet Stevenson. **3.45** Gillette World Sport. **4.15** KOTV Boxing Weekly. **4.40** Grand Designs Australia. A couple build a large house on an Adelaide hillside. (R) **5.35** Countdown. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Little Princess. **6.10** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **6.20** Poppy Cat. (R) **6.35** Wissper. (R) **6.40** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.45** Milkshake! Bopping About. (R) **6.50** Simon. (R) **7.00** Peppa Pig. (R) **7.05** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.15** Mofy. **7.20** Milkshake! Bop Box. (R) **7.25** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.35** Olly the Little White Van. (R) **7.50** Blaze and the Monster Machines. (R) **8.15** Paw Patrol. (R) **8.30** Nella the Princess Knight. (R) **8.50** Noddy: Toyland Detective. (R) **9.00** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.10** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **9.30** Digby Dragon. (R) **9.45** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.55** Peppa Pig. (R) **10.05** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.00** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **11.30 Film:** The Secret Life of Mrs Claus. (2015) **1.10 Film:** Journey Back to Christmas. (2016) Premiere. Festive fantasy, starring Candace Cameron Bure. **2.55** Trolls Holiday Special. **3.25** 5 News Weekend. **3.30 Film:** Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End. (2007) Fantasy adventure sequel, starring Johnny Depp. **4.30** 5 News Update. **4.35 Film:** Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End. (2007) Concluded.

6.45 Film: Need for Speed. (2014) A street racer is betrayed by a friend, and ends up being framed for causing a death during an illegal contest. Two years later, he is released from prison and returns to the underground racing circuit with revenge in mind. Action adventure based on the video game, starring Aaron Paul, Dominic Cooper, Imogen Poots and Michael Keaton. Edited for language and nudity.

9.00 Film: Chappie. (2015) Premiere. Two small-time crooks kidnap the inventor of a highly intelligent law-enforcement robot. They force him to reprogram the android so it will help them carry out an audacious heist worth $200million, but in doing so, incur the wrath of a ruthless and corrupt general. Sci-fi thriller, starring Sharlto Copley, Hugh Jackman and Dev Patel.

10.00 5 News Update.

10.05 Film: Chappie. (2015) Concluded.

11.20 Film: Resident Evil: Afterlife. (2010) Zombie-fighting heroine Alice's search for human survivors leads her into a deadly trap. Action horror sequel, starring Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter and Wentworth Miller.

1.05 SuperCasino. **3.10** Soap Star Killer: Countdown to Murder. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 Only Connect **7.30** University Challenge **8.00** Young, Gifted and Classical: The Making of a Maestro **9.00** Leonora Carrington: The Lost Surrealist **10.00** The Sky at Night **10.30** Horizon: Tim Peake Special – How to Be an Astronaut **11.30** Secret Knowledge: Walter Scott's Castle **12.00** Britain's Lost Waterlands: Escape to Swallows and Amazons Country **1.00** Peaky Blinders **3.55** Close

ITV2

12.00 Mr Bean **12.30** Merry Christmas Mr Bean **1.00** You've Been Framed! With Bells On! **1.25** You've Been Framed at Christmas! **2.00** Take Me Out Celebrity Christmas Special **3.05** I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! **4.35 Film:** Yogi Bear (2010) **5.35** FYI Daily **5.40 Film:** Yogi Bear (2010) **6.10 Film:** Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **7.10** FYI Daily **7.15 Film:** Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **8.00 Film:** The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006) **9.00** FYI Daily **9.05 Film:** The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006) **10.05** Family Guy **10.35** I'm a Celebrity: Extra Camp **11.35** Family Guy **12.05** American Dad! **12.35 Film:** Carrie (2013) **1.35** FYI Daily **1.40 Film:** Carrie (2013) **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV3

12.45 Film: Columbo Goes to the Guillotine (1989) **2.45 Film:** Ben-Hur (1959) **3.45** FYI Daily **3.50 Film:** Ben-Hur (1959) **7.00** The History of Mr Polly **9.00** Endeavour **11.00** Lewis **1.00** The Knock **3.00** The History of Mr Polly **4.40** On the Buses **5.50** ITV3 Nightscreen

ITV4

1.05 Film: The Last Sunset (1961) **2.10** FYI Daily **2.15 Film:** The Last Sunset (1961) **3.20 Film:** Paranoia (2013) **4.20** FYI Daily **4.25 Film:** Paranoia (2013) **5.25 Film:** The Man with the Golden Gun (1974) **6.25** FYI Daily **6.30 Film:** The Man with the Golden Gun (1974) **8.00 Film:** A View to a Kill (1985) **9.05** FYI Daily **9.10 Film:** A View to a Kill (1985) **10.40 Film:** Species (1995) **11.40** FYI Daily **11.45 Film:** Species (1995) **12.50 Film:** Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning (2012) **1.50** FYI Daily **1.55 Film:** Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning (2012) **3.00** Teleshopping

E4

12.00 Film: A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures (2010) **1.45** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **2.00** Frozen at Christmas **3.00** The Goldbergs **4.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** Prometheus (2012) **11.25** Gogglebox **12.30** The Inbetweeners **1.35** Rude Tube **2.35** First Dates Hotel

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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
The Christmas Gift, Channel 5, 12pm
A cold-hearted architect is sent to assess a small town for possible redevelopment as a ski resort, and decides to take his daughter along on the trip. But before long, their warm welcome by the residents begins to melt his frosty facade, turning him against his boss and the company's unscrupulous plans. Drama, starring John Denver, Jane Kaczmarek and Kurtwood Smith. (1986)

TUESDAY
Merry Ex-mas, Channel 5, 1.30pm
During a blizzard at Christmas, Noelle finds herself stranded with her ex-husband, forcing them to finally face their unresolved feelings for each other. Drama, starring Kristy Swanson. (2014)

WEDNESDAY
Guess Who's Coming to Christmas, Channel 5, 12pm
A cynical rock star receives a letter from a young fan, inviting him to spend the festive season with the youngster and his family and asking if he will perform at the local Christmas concert. With his public image in need of a boost, he reluctantly agrees to the request, but unexpectedly finds himself warming to his hosts' holiday spirit. Comedy, with Drew Lachey. (2013)

Once Upon a Christmas, Friday, Channel 5, 1.35pm

THURSDAY
An Unexpected Christmas, Channel 5, 3.20pm
Newlyweds the Fabers plan to host their first Christmas together and want everything to be perfect for their visiting relatives. However, Cynthia learns she is pregnant ahead of schedule and Steve suddenly loses his job, so the couple decide to hide the news from their families. Festive comedy, starring Susie Abromeit, Dillon Casey and Erin Gray. (2016)

FRIDAY
Once Upon a Christmas, Channel 5, 1.35pm
When a princess escapes her entourage and explores New York over Christmas, she meets a young man who shows her his side of the city. Romantic drama, starring Briana Evigan and Paul Campbell. (2015)

PICK OF THE WEEK

Modern confectioners discover their sweet tooth

In a couple of weeks, most of us will probably be sick of the sight of food and drink, in particular sweet treats.

But before we begin the annual season of overindulgence, the Sweetmakers are back on our screens to take us on a journey into the past.

Following the success of their Tudor Treat, Victorian Treat and Georgian Treat shows on BBC Two earlier this year, the four modern confectioners will recreate and reinvent past Christmas treats.

Award-winning chocolatiers Paul A Young and Diana Short, bespoke cake decorator and owner of Pretty Gorgeous Cake Company Cynthia Stroud, and sweet consultant and candy creator Andy Baxendale will use original recipes and equipment to whip up some of the bestsellers from yuletides of the past.

From candy canes, sugar mice and fudge, to yule logs, chocolate coins and selection boxes, sweet treats have become an integral part of our festive celebrations.

The quartet will discover how their predecessors helped come up with many of the culinary festive traditions that we enjoy today.

Guided by food historian and writer Dr Annie Gray and social historian and broadcaster Emma Dabiri, the Sweetmakers start by uncovering the mystery of what a sugarplum is – and it has nothing to do with the fruit.

They then decorate a series of exquisite Twelfth Cakes, which were the Georgian precursors of the Victorian Christmas Cake and date back to the medieval period.

They were at the height of their popularity with the wealthy elite when John Mollard wrote his cookery book in 1803.

Back then, it was the custom for each guest at a Twelfth Day get together to be assigned the role of a particular character by choosing a card at random from a pack and take on the identity for the whole night.

The entertainment ended with the finale of cutting the elegantly iced cake, which was usually very large and decorated with two crowns for the king and queen and sugar paste or wax images of the other characters.

As they move into the Victorian era, our confectioners encounter the massive gulf between rich and poor. They create treats for both, beginning with one of Queen Victoria's favourites – Boar's Head cake.

Then they create jelly pistols and sugar mice which were accessible to everyone in the 1900s, even children with just a few pennies to spend.

Finally, they'll explore the wealth of chocolate novelties launched in the 1920s, including the predecessor of the modern Christmas favourite the Chocolate Orange.

The Terry's 'Dessert Chocolate Apple' was made from 1926 before being outshone by the company's Chocolate Orange, which eventually led to the halt in production of the apple in 1954.

The Sweetmakers at Christmas, Friday, BBC2, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY
Hatton Garden
ITV, 9pm
In April 2015, a gang of ageing criminals pulled off an audacious burglary in the heart of London's diamond district, getting away with jewellery and cash. The crime certainly captured the public's imagination – it's already inspired two films, with another, starring Michael Caine and Ray Winstone, currently in the works. It's also the inspiration for this four-part drama from Little Boy Blue writer Jeff Pope, which is showing across consecutive evenings. The first episode introduces us to the gang, played by actors including Timothy Spall, Kenneth Cranham and Brìan F O'Byrne, as they plan their ingenious heist. But the series won't be about glorifying their actions, as it goes on to explore the tensions within the group – and the impact of the robbery on their victims.

TUESDAY
The World's Most Expensive Presents
Channel 4, 9pm
During this occasional series, we've already met some of those people with a habit of spending a fortune on an extravagant Christmas, including one individual who shelled out £615,000 on diamond-encrusted tree toppers. Tonight, the latest edition looks at what these kinds of big spenders may be planning on putting under the tree this yuletide, while cameras follow craftsmen and women producing lavish gifts - which have sizeable price tags to match. These include a 24-carat gold-plated bike worth a whopping £250,000. There's also a look at the dog owner who has big ideas to impress the guests at a glitzy party - namely dressing their beloved pooch in a specially made £40,000 ball gown.

WEDNESDAY
Mary Berry's Country House Secrets
BBC1, 8pm
In the final episode of the series, Mary visits Goodwood House, home to the March family, famous for their iconic horse racing and motoring events. She is taken on a thrilling lap of Goodwood motor circuit by Lord March, before attending one of his infamous dinner parties where 300 guests dine in style in splendid state rooms. Mary also learns more about the Estate's organic farm, before preparing a Coq-au-Vin and a four tier cake for a cricket tea set in one of the oldest cricket clubs in the world. Last in the series.

Harrogate: A Yorkshire Christmas
Channel 5, 9pm
The Yorkshire spa town of Harrogate has frequently topped the list of Britain's 'happiest places to live', so as Christmas approaches does that mean the streets are overflowing with festive cheer? Or are some locals feeling more stressed than seasonal? This two-part programme meets some of the business owners who are fighting to ensure that shoppers don't abandon Harrogate's independent boutiques and tea rooms for big out-of-town centres or the internet at this important time – and one way they hope to give visitors a unique experience is through the annual Christmas windows competition. Meanwhile, a local college is also running its own contest to design a sculpture to be the centrepiece of the town's decorations.

Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast, Friday, Channel 4, 8pm

THURSDAY
The Apprentice: Why I Fired Them
BBC1, 8pm
Giving a robot two different names, running out of booze in a corporate box at Wembley Stadium and filming a modern family car advertisement in a Norman fort are just some of the fatal errors committed by this year's Apprentice candidates. Now, with the final just days away and Lord Sugar on the cusp of choosing his new business partner, this programme offers viewers the chance to look back on the candidates who fell before the final hurdle. Helped by previously unseen insights from his eagle-eyed lieutenants Karren Brady and Claude Littner, Lord Sugar leads us through the best and worst decisions made by the wannabe business moguls. He also looks back on the boardroom bust-ups, and explains how he came to his decisions on who would hear those famous words 'You're Fired!'.

FRIDAY
Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast
Channel 4, 8pm
Jamie Oliver tutors guest Sarah Millican on recreating her favourite microwave meal, while Jimmy Doherty builds a soft-serve ice-cream machine for a child's birthday party.

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BRAIN GYM

No.459

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.

2	17	17	21	1	17	■	15	21	11	24	10	17
■	3	■	12	■	18	■	21	■	21	■	■	2
■	5	■	9	19	24	23	25	13	7	13	1	6
20	13	7	21	■	24	■	13	■	21	■	■	13
■	19	■	18	■	4	■	21	■	19	■	■	18
■	26	2	22	18	21	17	17	■	17	8	2	10
1	■	8	■	■	■	14	■	■	■	2	■	17
2	12	25	21	■	9	13	23 C	14	2	12	21	■
23	■	■	18	■	5	■	24 O	■	15	■	19	■
1	■	■	16	■	1	■	26	■	16	5	26	9
13	26	9	24	17	17	13	15	25	21	■	13	■
23	■	■	13	■	23	■	2	■	23	■	18	■
17	1	21	18	23	20	■	1	13	1	25	21	22

1	14
2	15
3	16
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22
10	23 C
11	24 O
12	25
13	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1 D	2 M	3 P	4 W	5 G	6 E	7 B	8 C	9 S	10 J	11 L	12 U	13 H
14 I	15 V	16 O	17 F	18 A	19 R	20 X	21 Y	22 Z	23 N	24 T	25 Q	26 K

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

Cryptic Clues:

Across

3. Game bird is all ruffled (9)
8. Customs applications (4)
9. Tropic island produce (9)
10. Where you must go if you get time (6)
11. Put your towel, if not your shirt, on it (5)
14. Superstitious attraction (5)
15. Adjust the sails or dock (4)
16. Gather together for a service (5)
18. Nothing we'd failed to settle (4)
20. Pursue a certain line (5)
21. Is old, perhaps, but dependable (5)
24. A crafty offer? (6)
25. Bad enough to cause alarm (9)
26. The company is not out to make money (4)
27. Lady killer (9)

Down

1. Not much reason for doubt (9)
2. Thinks time and dates are wrong (9)
4. I fled the country (4)
5. It's noted for its slowness (5)
6. Confront with a small account charge (6)
7. Girl in a road accident (4)
9. It won't stop you reading for long (5)
11. Gather a crowd, we hear (5)
12. Youngster who works on commission? (6,3)
13. Cigarband? (5,4)
17. Might be cold, yet good tempered (5)
19. Followed in a persistent way (6)
22. Bury the reconstituted nitre (5)
23. A fur for a foreign lady (4)
24. Boats wrecked by a wind (4)

1	■	2	■	3	4		5		6		7	
8				■		■		■		■		■
	■		■	9								
10						■		■		■		■
	■		■		■	11				12	■	13
14					■		■	■	15			
	■		■	16				17	■		■	
18			19	■	■		■	20				
	■	21			22		■		■		■	
■	23	■		■		■	24					
25									■		■	
■		■		■		■		■	26			
27									■		■	

Quick Clues:

Across

3. Walk (9)
8. Engrave (4)
9. Ascribe (9)
10. Pass (6)
11. Traded (5)
14. Things pointed out (5)
15. Apiece (4)
16. Kingdom (5)
18. Wander (4)
20. Go in (5)
21. Faithful (5)
24. Signal-fire (6)
25. Edible (9)
26. A fish (4)
27. Employees (9)

Down

1. Sitting (9)
2. 8-sided (9)
4. Ceremony (4)
5. Coalesce (5)
6. Marriageable (6)
7. Obligation (4)
9. A flower (5)
11. Slow manner of speaking (5)
12. Strategist (9)
13. Pungency (9)
17. Confused fight (5)
19. Bog (6)
22. Repeated (5)
23. Urn (4)
24. Melancholy (4)

Sudoku

		3		2				5
		6	4		8		7	
7		8			5	4		
4				6		9		7
		9						
		1		8			5	6
8		7	3			5		9
	1				6	7		
2				4		6		8

Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

7	2	8	5	3	6	4	1	9
5	4	3	2	9	1	6	8	7
9	6	1	8	7	4	3	5	2
3	1	7	9	6	5	8	2	4
4	8	5	1	2	3	7	9	6
6	9	2	4	8	7	5	3	1
1	7	6	3	5	2	9	4	8
8	5	4	7	1	9	2	6	3
2	3	9	6	4	8	1	7	5

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Sack; 3 Triangle; 8 Eats; 9 Aversion; 11 Made advances; 13 Relays; 14 Stroll; 17 Putting-green; 20 Waited on; 21 Zany; 22 Minatory; 23 Brae.
Down: 1 Steamers; 2 Citadel; 4 Revive; 5 Apron stage; 6 Guide; 7 Eons; 10 Easy street; 12 Blantyre; 15 Open-air; 16 Indoor; 18 Union; 19 Swim. QUICK - Across: 1 Icon; 3 Activate; 8 Tier; 9 Headland; 11 Misrepresent; 13 Themes; 14 Proper; 17 Amelioration; 20 Confound; 21 Base; 22 Derisory; 23 Weir. Down: 1 Intimate; 2 Oversee; 4 Cheery; 5 Industrial; 6 Again; 7 Eddy; 10 Rebellious; 12 Grandeur; 15 Primate; 16 Joiner; 18 Minor; 19 Iced.

Quiz

1. Which Bizet opera was based on a story by Prosper Merimee?
2. Who wrote the film The Misfits for Marilyn Monroe?
3. In which US city is the counterpart of London's Cleopatra's Needle?
4. Of what is a dyne a unit?
5. Which country is immediately north of Panama?
6. What is the full form of i.e.?
7. How is the herb Artemisia dracunculus better known?
8. Of which US state is Helena the capital?
9. Which mammal's most commonly-seen variety is the bottlenosed?
10. Whose voice does Plato use in The Republic?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Boudicca; 2 Hungary; 3 Michael Bentt; 4 Peter Lorre; 5 The Oval; 6 Zeus; 7 China; 8 Raspberry; 9 Poliomyelitis; 10 Bernardo Bertolucci.

Niner: EDINBURGH

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

97386 gives an alarm,
1536 gives a second alarm,
42672 gives an obsession.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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Embracing Eden's winter delights

The Eden Project is best known for its impressive biomes, recreating the rainforest and Mediterranean climates where delicate and exotic plants flourish in the depths of the rough, Cornish countryside.

But a treat is in store for those visiting in December, as the Winter Festival continues.

It's the perfect time to visit the Eden Project in Bodelva and embrace the delights of the changing season. Surrounding the biomes, there are many spectacular autumn sights, from feathery gold and crimson leaves along the Land Train route to the stunning acers in the Japanese Swale Garden.

Few of us have space for our own biome, but the outdoor gardens offer plenty of inspiration for even the most amateur gardener.

The sprawling Eden Project at Bodelva

Inside a biome

Exploring the wild outdoors

BARREN

In the Wild Cornwall area, there are quiet paths and natural borders which celebrate the wealth of the county's landscapes, habitats and wildlife. It's also a reminder of the site's transformation from a barren, former clay pit to the 'eighth wonder of the world', now seen by millions of visitors since opening in March 2001.

Eden is home to nearly two million plants and more than 5,000 varieties of plants within its 30 acres and claims to be 'a year-round horticultural extravaganza'. For our October visit, there was certainly plenty to wonder at as we explored the outdoor areas, accompanied by labrador Bonnie.

Eden is dog-friendly apart from the biomes and certain indoor areas and we were thrilled to meet dozens of four-legged friends during the day. There are water bowls, doggie bins and shaded car park spaces available, making it easy to take your pet along too.

There is also a great deal to interest children and, being half term, there were hundreds of families, like us, enjoying a day out in the fresh air. With pasties and ice creams on offer, it was pretty much perfect.

The most popular attraction for us was the ice rink which had just opened ready for the Winter Festival. Skating is on offer through to February 18 and a 40-minute general session costs £7 for adults and £6 for children, including skate hire.

While our two burned off some energy, we took turns to have another peek inside the biomes. Many of the other visitors were locals, it seemed – a special pass is available for residents of Cornwall and Devon – and so there really must be something new to discover each time. The views inside the structures are breathtaking with something different to admire from every angle. In the rainforest biome there are groups of tropical roulrouls (crested partridges) which go about their business oblivious to the droves of visitors.

For the Christmas season, the biomes will feature festive plantings and host the dazzling Festival of Light and Sound on selected dates until December 30.

From 5-8pm, the Mediterranean Biome will be transformed with beautifully choreographed music and dancing light projections. The show is included in normal admission fees. Meanwhile, in the Rainforest Biome there is a magical after-dark experience and the chance to catch a rare glimpse of the rainforest by night from the 50m high Lookout.

Plus, there are craft workshops before the festivities kick off. Throughout the Winter Festival, there is an array of seasonal food in the cafes, plus plenty of Christmas shopping. Until December 24, visitors can see Father Christmas and his elves.

For full details visit www.edenproject.com

BY LIZ GRAY

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Come and join us for our famous Christmas German market at the shovel inn pub on the 7th, 8th and 9th of December.

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Vauxhall's Grandland X is very well put together

Grandland X has a robust stance, with accentuated wheel arches and a wide front grille

By Carmel Stewart

The Grandland X is an important vehicle for Vauxhall, completing as its does the company's crossover trio of SUVs which began with the mid-sized 4WD Mokka X, followed by the compact 2WD Crossland X.

You would be forgiven for thinking that the Daddy of the range was a robust 4x4 but, in fact, it comes in 2WD only with an optional electronic grip control which adapts the torque distribution for optimum traction, depending on which of the driving modes has been selected – normal, snow mud or sand.

Similar in styling to the slightly smaller Mokka X, the Grandland X has a robust stance, with accentuated wheel arches and a wide front grille with a sill plate below plus slim LEDs front and rear. A high waist and chrome highlights add an aerodynamic appeal.

Inside where there is space enough for five occupants, the driving position is elevated, the modern, well laid-out dash uncomplicated and the ambient lighting tastefully sufficient.

At the rear there is 514 litres of easy-load boot space which ups to 1,652 litres with the rear seat backs dropped down.

Engine choices are confined to two turbo units – a 1.2litre 130ps three-cylinder turbo petrol and a 1.6litre 120ps four-cylinder turbo diesel. Both can

Getting connected is easy in Grandland X

be combined with either a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission. Selection will come down to personal preference, with the diesel returning an official average of 70.6mpg mpg and the petrol 54.4mpg on 17-inch wheels. More engine options will be added next year.

On the road there are no real highs or lows. The ride is comfortable, the cabin quiet, the engines more than adequate, although the suspension is not as all absorbing as some of its rivals.

The Grandland X, while not exciting to drive, is well put together with a very decent standard spec. It will deliver its occupants to their required destination in unruffled comfort but it is entering into a very tough SUV market place which has doubled in size during the past six or seven years. Its rivals are long-established, so Vauxhall will need to sharpen its automotive elbows if it is to make an impact with this model.

But the newness of the Grandland X can also be considered a plus as many buyers like to drive the latest model and it is following in the tyre treads of the increasingly popular Mokka X.

Its specification list includes all the driving aids of any self-respecting modern vehicle: automatic cruise control with pedestrian detection and automatic emergency braking, driver drowsiness alert, and advanced park assist plus the option of a heated steering wheel, heated front and rear seats and smart tailgate, that opens with a flick of the foot.

All that, oh so vital, fingertip connectivity is also available through Vauxhall On Star, so you not only have automatic crash response alerting the emergency services should the airbags be deployed but can also book an hotel room, find a parking space and charge your smartphone wirelessly as well as access emails, phone messages, Google maps and the like thanks to the Apple CarPlay and Android Auto integration.

Prices start at £22,310 with LED daytime running lights, camera-based lane departure warning, road sign recognition, sat nav, eight-inch touch screen and air con all fitted as standard.

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VAUXHALL

Stourbridge Chronicle Thursday, December 7, 2017

In the black and exclusive to the UK

MINI UK has two special editions of MINI, the Cooper Black Pack Clubman and the Cooper D Black Pack Clubman.

Designed exclusively for the UK, the first MINI Clubman edition offers 17-inch Black Net spoke wheels combined with black bonnet stripes for a sleek and sporty finish to further enhance the characteristic MINI Clubman styling.

Inside, the design cues continue with a Piano Black interior and multi-function steering wheel. The MINI Black Pack badge which is featured on the rear doors of the vehicle highlights the exclusivity of the MINI Black Pack Clubman models.

In keeping with the entire MINI Clubman model range, the MINI Black Pack Clubman models also offer exceptionally high levels of standard equipment including MINI Navigation, Bluetooth, Cruise Control and MINI Connected. The MINI Excitement Pack which includes the MINI logo projection is also offered as standard.

Nicolas Griebner, head of product, MINI UK said: "The MINI Black Pack Clubman showcases the very best of MINI Clubman – a host of specially selected equipment combined with attractive visual options."

The new MINI Cooper available to order at MINI Retailers from today, on the road pricing starts at £21,430 for MINI Cooper Black Pack Clubman (£289 per month, with an initial rental of £289*) and £23,735 for MINI Cooper D Black Pack Clubman.

● The biggest and most versatile MINI to-date has been awarded 'Best Compact Crossover' by the Association of Scottish Motoring Writers. The new MINI Countryman was announced as the as the winner in this fiercely contested segment at the 2017 Scottish Car of the Year awards this evening.

The car has 17-inch Black Net spoke wheels

An award-winner, the MINI Countryman

The MINI Black Pack badge which is featured on the rear doors of the vehicle highlights the exclusivity of the Black Pack

Speaking at the awards, Stephen Park, president of the Association of Scottish Motoring Writers said: "Compact crossovers are in vogue and this year buyers have been spoiled for choice. Our favourite, the new MINI Countryman, marries good design with a spacious, high quality cabin and the choice of two or four-wheel-drive. There's also a huge options list for those who want to create a unique and personal car."

With its larger external dimensions, and increases in space throughout the cabin and luggage area, the new MINI Countryman offers occupants even greater comfort and a genuinely premium ambience. Useful new features such as electric tailgate control with touch-free opening and unique options, including a fold down picnic bench at the rear, add to the ownership experience.

The Countryman's on- and off-road ability is readily apparent throughout its design and, for the first time, MINI is offering a plug-in hybrid model with the new MINI Countryman Plug-In Hybrid. "We're thrilled that the ASMW have chosen the new MINI Countryman in this extremely competitive segment," said Leon Van Schie, head of marketing, MINI UK. "This very welcome award demonstrates that the latest addition to the MINI range is an enticing option which offers greater space, refinement and flexibility for our customers. Furthermore, the new MINI Countryman introduces unique features into this segment which are proving extremely popular with new and returning MINI customers alike."

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Official Government Test Environmental Data. Fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO_2 emissions (g/km). Grandland X Launch Edition 1.2 (130PS) Turbo Start/Stop: Urban: 44.1 (6.4), Extra Urban: 57.6 (4.9), Combined 52.3 (5.4). CO_2 emissions: 124g/km.#

Model shown Grandland X Launch Edition 1.2 (130PS) Turbo Start/Stop OTR £28,245. #Fuel consumption information is official government environmental data, tested in accordance with the relevant EU directive. Official EU-regulated test data is provided for comparison purposes and actual performance will depend on driving style, road conditions and other non-technical factors. Correct at time of going to press.

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Walsall's 13-15 years team who brought home the silver medal from Scotland

The under-12 show off their silver medals won in the team discipline

Georgia Baker in action. Pic: Scottish Swimming

Swimming team in sync to make a competition splash

SPORTING FEATURE

By Matt Maher

"The club has always been strong but we have seen a lot more people take an interest, particularly since the London Olympics."

TALENTED swimmers from Walsall Synchro Club have their sights set on national success after making a big splash in Scotland.

The club, who have their base at the town's Gala Baths, returned from the Scottish National Synchronised Swimming Championships with a haul of medals from both individual and team competitions.

Walsall won gold in the under-12s team event and also took silver in the 13-15 years team category.

Georgia Baker finished at the front of a competitive field in the solo under-12s competition.

She was followed onto the top step of the podium by England youth team members Olivia Baker and Robyn Swatman, who took the 13-15 years duet.

Competitive

Olivia Baker also took bronze in the 13-15 years solo event, while Georgia teamed up with Taliah Alves to win silver in the under-12s duet.

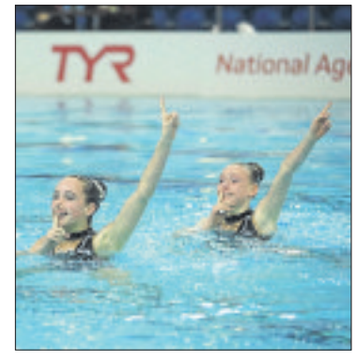
"The team did brilliantly in Scotland and got some really good results," said head coach Amy Baker. "It was particularly pleasing as the event attracts some of the biggest clubs in the country and the competition is fiercely competitive.

"For Georgia Baker to win the under-12s solo was a huge achievement. She is a swimmer with great potential."

Walsall's Scottish success followed a similarly strong showing in last month's Midlands Championships, held at their home pool. Alves won gold in the under-12s figures competition, with Georgia Baker winning silver to complete a one-two for the hosts in that category.

Robyn Swatman, gold medal winner in the 13-15 figures

Medal winners from the nationals in Gloucester



Robyn Swatman and Olivia Baker's routine

The duo then teamed up to win gold in the duets event, with team-mates Katie Lopez and Olivia Timms taking bronze, while Walsall achieved a clean sweep in the 13-15 years figures with Swatman taking victory ahead of Olivia Baker and Hannah Birch. The latter combined with Olivia Baker to win gold in the 13-15 years duet.

Walsall also won big in the team competitions, with victories for the 13-15 years squad in the exercise and free categories and the 15-18 years team in the combination event.

The under-12s team won gold in the free competition while the Muppets squad, whose routine is choreographed to music from the TV show, claimed silver.

Walsall Synchro Club were formed in 1972 and currently have close to 100 swimmers on their books.

"The club has always been strong but we have seen a lot more people take an interest, particularly since the London Olympics," said head coach Baker.

"It's got to the point where we don't really advertise anymore. People come to me on an almost daily basis asking if their child can have a trial.

"Many have a background in dance or gymnastics and want to give synchronised swimming a go. At the moment we have some really, really talented girls at the club. Both Olivia Baker and Robyn Swatman are part of the England squad at their age group and we are hopeful of getting a few more called-up should things go well at the nationals."

The success fuelled confidence ahead of the National Championships in Gloucester last weekend – and more medals followed.

Georgia Baker and Taliah Alves collected a silver medal in the 12 and under duets, with Olivia Timms and Kate Lopes back in ninth. Robyn Swatman and Olivia Baker collected a bronze in the 13-15s duets.

There was a silver medal in the 12 and unders teams. The 13-15 team finished fourth out of 17 entrants

Individually, Georgia Baker finished sixth and Taliah Alves eighth in the under-12s figures, from 130 competitors, Olivia Baker and Robyn Swatman, both only 13, ended 11th and 13th respectively, from 178 in the 13-15s.

In the solos, Georgia Baker narrowly missed out on third position in the under-13s, finishing just ahead of Talia Alves, Swatman and Olivia Baker finished eighth and ninth respectively.

Georgia, Taliah, Olivia Baker and Robyn were selected to attend Phase 1 of England trials held in Bristol on Saturday.

Ofosu-Ayeh no closer to return, says Nuno

WOLVES head coach Nuno Espirito Santo has revealed Phil Ofosu-Ayeh is no closer to being considered for selection. The 26-year-old full-back joined on a free transfer in the summer after leaving German side Eintracht Braunschweig but is yet to play for the club due to an ankle injury.

It was thought last month that he could return before the end of the year, but his recovery programme has not gone as planned.

Nuno hinted the club may have to cut their losses if the situation does not take an upturn soon, and said: "It's tough. The programme that is being done with him is trying to increase his load of running. But he still has pain.

"We have to be very cautious, not only because of this particular injury, but the way that Phil – for the last year – has struggled.

"He needs to settle down and solve, definitely, the problems that he has. Then we have to make a decision."

Ofosu-Ayeh underwent ankle surgery in early September. Born in Germany, he represents Ghana and has one cap for them.

Bucks boss rules out a move for Lescott

FORMER England ace Joleon Lescott, a two-time Premier League winner, will not be signing for AFC Telford United, club sources have revealed.

The 35-year-old former Wolves, Albion and Villa defender is without a club after being released from Sunderland at the end of last season – and has trained with the Bucks.

After the signing of former Wolves striker Sylvan Ebanks-Blake, there was speculation that former Molineux favourite Lescott – who has also had spells with Everton, Manchester City and AEK Athens – would also end up at the New Bucks Head.

Telford boss Rob Edwards played with Lescott at Wolves but stated 'nothing will happen'. It is believed though that the Bucks chief is on the lookout for a defender.

The Birmingham-born centre-half played 26 times for England. He won two Premier League medals, the FA Cup and League Cup during five years at City – and won the First Division play-offs with Wolves in 2003.

Development work wins coach top award

A DUDLEY sports coach has picked up a top accolade. Rus Smith, who leads the development of trainers and coach developers in the Midlands for StreetGames, was named as the Coach Developer of the Year category at the 2017 UK Coaching Awards.

Recognised with him were the three coaches – Benke Blomkvist, Christian Malcolm and Stephen Maguire – who led Great Britain's men's 4x100m team to gold at the 2017 World Athletics Championships. They won the High Performance Coach of the Year award.

This year marked the 20th anniversary of the showpiece annual event, held at The Honourable Artillery Company, City of London, last Thursday.

Smith offers his services to the FA and the Stourbridge Football League. He has delivered to more than 1,000 learners in the last 12 months. He said: "What an honour to have been announced as Coach Developer of the Year."

Mark Gannon, UK Coaching CEO, said: "Rus is fully deserving of the Coach Developer of the Year award."

Sport

Swimmers in sync for making a big splash
Page 35

A McLuckie break wins it for hosts

Workington 2 Stourbridge 1

STOURBRIDGE were denied a battling away point in the final minute of added time, suffering defeat in Leon Broadhurst's 700th appearance for the club.

Luke Shearer's goal in the 87th minute looked to have given the 10-man Glassboys a vital draw in the Evo-Stik Premier play-off race on Saturday. But Phil McLuckie grabbed a winner in the fourth minute of stoppage time.

The home side took the lead four minutes before the break with Sam Joel on hand to finish from close range.

Stour's task was made harder in the 80th minute as Luke Benbow was shown a straight red for what was deemed a studs-up challenge on Gari Rowntree.

Shearer equalised with three minutes left as he fired in Aaron Forde's cross following good work from the midfielder and substitute Josh Cooke.

But Workington had the final say deep into added time. Matty Douglas' shot through a crowded area was parried by Matt Gould and McLuckie was there to poke the ball home.

● Benbow's loan deal from Solihull Moors has been extended until January 30, but he will be suspended for three games from Saturday.

Since returning to the War Memorial Ground for his third spell at the club, Benbow has scored four goals in seven appearances and has 99 in all for the Glassboys.

Boss Gary Hackett said: "Luke needs to play. This is like a home for him and we can now move forward."

Loanee McAtee leads the Yeltz fightback for first win in eight

Halesowen Town 3 Whitby Town 1

ON-LOAN John McAtee struck twice as Halesowen came from behind to notch their first win in eight games. For the visitors, it was a 12th game without a win.

Yet the Seasiders took a fifth minute lead when Kyle Fryatt headed against the bar but tapped home the rebound.

After the disjointed start from Yeltz, McAtee led the recovery and he went close in the 33rd minute when a 25-yard shot hit the base of the post. But McAtee was soon on target with an equaliser with a deflected 36th minute shot from the edge of the penalty area.

Yeltz went ahead in the 61st minute when substitute Jack Kelly was set free down the left and his cross-shot pinged into the net.

A goal-bound shot from Whitby's Luke Bytheway was blocked for a corner before McAtee made Halesowen's vital points safe by stroking into the bottom corner with a cool 81st minute finish.

Yeltz keeper Dan Platt saved from Matthew Tymon in injury time and Whitby sub Keiron Weledji headed wide.

Bosses vow to keep Heathens on track

Speedway

CRADLEY Heathens bosses say they are determined to do everything they can to ensure a team takes to the track in 2018.

The perennial problem of stadium availability and fixture congestion is again the single biggest obstacle to overcome for the Heathens.

Much will depend on the number of clubs entering the National League for the upcoming season and how many dates are available at Monmore Green, Wolverhampton.

Following a meeting last Wednesday afternoon, co-promoter Gary Patchett said: "We enjoyed a very positive meeting and we are unanimously agreed we will do everything we can to keep the team on the track.

"We have some proposals we would like to present to the other clubs when we eventually get a date for the National League AGM and then we can make some firm plans. Until then we are in a state of flux.

"We need the supporters to remain patient and we thank them for that," he added. "Without going into detail, the various issues we have had to face, both individually and collectively, would have made it easier to bring the current era to a close but we are committed to keeping the Heathens going despite the challenging circumstances we have faced this year. Our hearts are definitely ruling our heads!

"We need positivity throughout the club and, most importantly, we need to be certain the support will still be there for us moving forward.

"Whilst there are still hurdles for us to overcome and issues to address over which we have little or no control we are optimistic of a positive result."

STOUR'S BIG DAY FALLS FLAT

Stourbridge 0 Hinckley 35

ON a momentous day at Stourton Park, Stourbridge were unable to rise to the occasion and fell to defeat at the hands of title rivals.

Plans to celebrate the official opening of the AGP were spoilt by a Hinckley side whose clinical finishing proved too much for their hosts.

The hosts were unable to capitalise on hard-earned territory and possession, though the game was probably closer than the scoreline suggests.

A bumper crowd of 475 turned out to see former Leicester, England and British Lions hooker Peter Wheeler cut the ceremonial ribbon and, as if by magic, the morning drizzle stopped, the sun came out and the scene was set for this top of the table clash with both sides on 49 points but with the visitors edging the stats with 10 wins to Stour's nine. Indeed, very little separated the teams for the first 39 minutes – until Hinckley broke the deadlock.

Attacking

No 8 Alex Salt added try number 11 to his season's tally and No 9 Joseph Glover slotted over a tricky conversion from out left.

Stour took heart when the Hinckley tight head was shown a yellow card for bringing down an attacking maul less than 10 minutes into the second period.

Stourbridge spent a good 15 minutes of the second half, inside their opposition's half but came away empty handed after eight visits into the 22. Their last real opportunity for points came with 58 minutes on the clock, but a 40m kick fell short and the visitors went on to dominate.

The next score came with 15 minutes left after Stour lost the ball and second row Ben Marshall was sent away to score, with Glover converting.

Bizarrely, referee Davies awarded a penalty kick off to Stourbridge after altercations between various players but the hosts failed to capitalise on any territorial advantage. They even managed to lose the ball from a quick tap penalty only to be met by a morale sapping counter attack.

The floodgates started to creak open and Sam Driver scored under the posts, again converted by Glover. They only had to wait four minutes before replacement centre George Marsden got his name on the score sheet. Full back Callum Dacey took over the kicking duties to take the unanswered points tally to 28. It was Dacey who added yet another seven when he swooped on a ball lost by a Stourbridge player, again in contact, and scampered over for a relatively simple conversion.

Stourbridge face a long trek to second-placed Tynedale on Saturday.

The club wishes to recognise the contribution made by Charlie Jeavons-Fellows who returns home to Australia for Christmas, a well-earned break travelling and university life.

Sam Pailor goes on the run for Stourbridge during the weekend's clash against Hinckley

DK run into a relegation spot of bother

IT was a difficult afternoon for Dudley Kingswinford Running Club's male athletes as they tried to run their way out of a Birmingham and District Cross Country League Division 2 relegation spot.

The big guns were unavailable due to injury for the second of four league fixtures at Stratford-upon-Avon. Although DK could muster 14 runners it was the quality that was lacking.

The blue hoops battled hard over a hilly three-lap course which included a quarter of a mile that had to be tackled on each lap, but it was always too much of a mountain to climb, in more ways than one. The quality was outstanding, with Cannock & Stafford, Telford AC and Halesowen competing. To highlight the gulf in class, a former top class athlete running from Bromsgrove & Redditch who had represented Great Britain in the World Championships in both Rome and Athens could only finish 12th.

In a competition where lowest is best DK scored 823 points which placed them 17th of the 17 competing teams, allowing Gloucester to leapfrog them in the league and place them bottom.

The ladies fared better at the same venue in the Midlands Women's League Division 2. Over a lap shorter, they only had to scale the hill twice – but still found it tough. Despite a better showing they also sit bottom of the league.

Twenty fours later Andy Sprague took on the Cardington Cracker, a tough Shropshire fell race, coming home in 84th place in 1.43.29.

Indoor five-a-side league to kick off

AN all-year round football league the weather can't spoil kicks off in Stourbridge this weekend. The five-a-side league gets under way at Crystal Leisure Centre on Sunday 10, from 5-7pm.

The competition is being operated by nationwide company 5aside.co.uk. Spokesman, Sam Taylor said: "We can guarantee you a game each week, whatever the weather."

Sam confirmed the league would see multiple divisions, and added: "You turn up, pay your match fee and enjoy the game."

Matches cost £30. To sign up, head to www.5aside.co.uk

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